

# TLS

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An ink drawing, 1918, by Fortunato Depero. (It is reproduced from *Il Futurismo e la moda. Balla e gli altri* by Enrico Crispolti, reviewed on page 1099)

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## Smiles and snarls

### David Coward

RENÉ POMEAU

*Beaumarchais ou la bizarre destinée*  
277pp. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.  
140fr.

Perhaps the vilest trick played on Beaumarchais by fate is to have allowed his reputation to have been hijacked. *Le Barbier de Séville* (1775) has been virtually annexed by Rossini and *Le Mariage de Figaro* by Mozart (with a little help from Da Ponte). Yet the operas are to Beaumarchais's comic masterpieces what sausages are to red meat – smoother-skinned, finer-flavoured and more delicately textured, but processed products none the less. Rossini's *Figaro* is a cheeky comic valet; Mozart demotes the intriguer after Act Two and abandons the subversive punch of the original in favour of the feelings of Alnaviva and the Countess. Beaumarchais deserves better than to have had his barber turned into other people's pies. His plays are bustling and combative and they go for the jocular and the jocular with equal zest. In *Figaro*, he not only created a freestanding character of great energy but also encapsulated the essence of a certain kind of emballed Frenchness. But while his decline is to be explained in part by the fact that other people made such superior pies of him, it is also true that he has been the victim of changing taste and of his own enigmatic and not always attractive personality.

René Pomeau is interested in the "Beaumarchais phenomenon" and the "bizarre destiny" which drove him during his life and dogged him after his death. This book is neither biography nor literary criticism but a supremely lucid unravelling of the man and his work. Originally published in 1956 and now given a new lease of life in a restructured and updated form, it makes a welcome reappearance as the most incisive and intelligent guide available to an author who is one of France's national institutions. Account is taken of the scholarly findings of the past thirty years – the discovery of *Le Socrate* as an added stage in the creation of *Le Barbier*, the adaptation of Voltaire's *Samson* together with new details of Beaumarchais's complicated life and dealings – but Pomeau's views remain substantially the same. He still admires the energy of the fighter but finds it no easier to like the self-server. He applauds the pace and movement of the plays but finds weaknesses in Beaumarchais's occasional vulgarity and his habit of letting scenes run on.

Pomeau's Beaumarchais is a not quite quintessentially late eighteenth-century man whose virtues and faults are those of his age. As he remarks, Beaumarchais was happiest when engaged upon some difficult enterprise designed both to make him rich and to serve humanity in some way – and this could mean anything from creating a profitable new water-supply for Paris to running guns for the American insurgents in their libertarian struggle against the British oppressor. Seen thus, Beaumarchais epitomizes the tension between practical realism and philosophical idealism which the Enlightenment sponsored but never resolved. He fought his many battles with a williness which was a form of reason; he wrote his plays from a base of sensibility. The problem for Pomeau, as it has been for other commentators, is that Beaumarchais's bourgeois individualism incorporated an element of the crooked, and that even his philanthropy was rooted in the belief that charity begins at home.

He was born in 1732, the son of a Parisian watchmaker named Caron. Home was happy and cultured, and there he absorbed the heady mixture of practical work and that melodramatic "virtue" which the French were already beginning to admire in the novels of Richardson. In 1753, he invented a new escapement mechanism which was appropriated by an associate of his father. He complained to the authorities and then, when the affair dragged on, he set out his case in the *Mercur de France*. It was a cheeky move which not only won the argument but attracted the attention of the king. A lesser man might have settled for a life as Watchmaker by Appointment, but the sight of the Court had opened horizons and awakened ambitions. By 1760, having acquired an estate and the widow who went with it, he had become Monsieur de Beaumarchais, a favourite with the king's elderly daughters and a familiar at the home of Le Normant, titular husband to Louis XV's titular mistress. It was there that he staged a number of crude farces which an odd inverted snobbery had made fashionable in a high society bored with the regularities of quality theatre. But he was also much taken with Diderot's theory of the *drame bourgeois* and began writing *Eugénie*, which was performed in 1767.

By the early 1770s, he had yet to gain the position and wealth which he believed his talents deserved. He had acquired protectors but had made powerful enemies. Experience soon

taught him that while society might find him amusing, ranks closed against pushy outsiders as solidly in the 1770s as they had in 1726 against that other performing monkey, Voltaire. But whereas Voltaire went into exile in England, Beaumarchais turned to litigation. And when he lost, as he often did, he appealed directly to the public in spirited and witty pleas in his own defence. Conceiving polemics as a major spectator sport, he played to the gallery, which generally gave judgment in his favour.

But behind the high-profile style of the polemicist lurks the shadowier figure of Beaumarchais the secret agent and go-between. Pomeau is a marvellously clear guide to these secret activities, which saw Beaumarchais career across Europe in rather sordid attempts to buy off enemies of the State, falling out with that other arch-plotter, the man-woman D'Eon, shipping the very guns which defeated Burgoyne at Saratoga and, in the process, spending vast sums of money, most of which was not his own. In many ways, Beaumarchais belongs with the likes of Fox, Potemkin, Kaunitz and Mirabeau, who also served Crown, country and causes while helping themselves along the way. Interested to a fault, he nevertheless lost large sums in publishing a complete edition of Voltaire's works as an act of homage. He who sought Court favour was prepared to brave Louis XVI to have *Le Mariage* staged. For all Marceline's defence of women's rights, he did not marry his long-suffering mistress until 1786, but he did not hesitate to rescue Mme Kornmann, who had been so cruelly treated by her husband. It was a typically quixotic gesture that was to cost him dear, for, although the courts found for him, he emerged from the affair as a corrupter of innocence and the embodiment of the tyrannies of the *ancien régime*.

It was thus that Beaumarchais, the Friend to Freedom, entered the Revolution as one of its more hated enemies. In reality, his reservations about events derived from his consistent belief that freedom is the rule of law and that law is neither the property of judges nor the prerogative of the braying mob. It was a view which ensured that he was detested by both right and left. In June 1792, *La Mère coupable*, the last of the *Figaro* trilogy, received a hostile reception. But Beaumarchais was by this time embroiled in another arms deal which almost cost him his life when, in August, a mob invaded his house looking for guns (but found only unsold stocks of the works of Voltaire). He was jailed, freed and rehabilitated without

ever ceasing to be a "suspect". To vindicate himself, he published a series of *mémoires* which Sainte-Beuve despised but which Pomeau describes as "heroic". Exiled as an émigré, Beaumarchais returned to Paris in 1796, poor, deaf, but still game. He believed he could win Pitt's confidence, but no one asked him to try. Unavailingly, he pressed Talleyrand to make him ambassador to the United States. He was still scheming and publishing when, in a rare moment of inattentiveness, he died in his sleep in 1799. He left an estate worth one million francs.

Was he a cad or an engaging *pifaro*? On balance, Pomeau regards him, with reservations, as a sharper Charles Surface: somewhat wobbly but fundamentally sound. He neatly captures the contradiction between his genuine idealism and his no less authentic self-centredness by remarking that his *mémoires* against Goetzman may be exemplary models of self-defence, but self-defence is all they are: they plead not the cause of justice but the cause of Beaumarchais. Paradoxically, however, it is not for sporting the unacceptable face of capitalism that Beaumarchais has been most frequently attacked (and praised) but for his role in hastening the end of the *ancien régime*. Danton observed that *Figaro* killed off the aristocracy and Napoleon said that he would have had a trouble-maker like Beaumarchais locked up: "*Le Mariage de Figaro, c'est la Révolution en action*". The nineteenth-century establishment thought almost as badly of him as it did of Voltaire, the Great Subversive. Perhaps the real question is not whether Beaumarchais was a boomer or a likeable rogue but whether he was an irreverent eighteenth-century sprite or a begueter of the Revolution.

*Le Barbier* shows a commoner who is superior to his social betters. The situation was hardly new but the opening exchanges make it clear that *Figaro* is not just another cheeky servant or licensed fool. His impertinence has an edge which makes it sound like a challenge – does Alnaviva know many masters who would make adequate valets? – and his gift for manipulation turns his defiance into a threat. It is he who masterminds the ineffectual Alnaviva's romance just as he outwits Bartholo, the enemy of electricity, freedom of thought, toleration, the *Encyclopédie* and everything the philosophic spirit stood for. In *Le Mariage*, *Figaro*'s plans do not work as well but he chafes even more openly against oppression. He demands the right to happiness, the freedom of the press and an end to arbitrary justice.

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Backed by Almaviva's vassals, in a sort of pounce revolution, he forces his master to renounce the symbolic privilege of the *droit de seigneur* on which the plot revolves. Louis XVI had no doubt about the play and banned it: "the Bastille would have to be pulled down before such a play could be safely staged". His failure to make his ban stick was not simply a defeat for him but for the monarchy itself. "Persons of every condition", wrote one contemporary, flocked to see Figaro "as though to find consolation in laughing at the foolishness of those who are the cause of their miseries".

Yet it is far from clear that Beaumarchais wanted Revolution. After Figaro says his piece in Act One of *Le Barbier*, he is happy enough to serve his master. Nor does *Le Mariage* suggest that the philandering Almaviva (who even as a rake is not in Valmont's class) is not a just magistrate and sound seigneurial administrator. In both plays, Figaro confesses that he fares badly when he is his own master. In the castle of Arvas Frescos all may not be well, but Figaro thrives, grumbling, plotting but reveling in his role as privileged troublemaker.

Pomeau does not deny that Figaro, like his creator, expresses views which are highly critical of the *ancien régime*, yet he concludes that the servant belongs in his master's castle in the same way that Beaumarchais belonged to his century—in a state of opportunistic connivance. The Enlightenment was less an Age of Reason

than of Applied Reason, and Beaumarchais, the upwardly mobile bourgeois individualist, applied Voltairian lessons as much to social problems as he did to his own life. He believed that while Fate may deal the cards, every man must be free to play his own hand. It is to this freedom that Figaro aspires. He is the radical, the anarchistic, anti-authoritarian Frenchman who will oppose injustice whatever its political colour. His attractiveness lies in his cheerful resilience, his "gaiety", his readiness to abandon failed plans and try again. Far from being a revolutionary, Figaro is the incarnation of the bourgeois spirit in, *pace* Pomeau, its often Poujadiste guise.

But there is no cause to dispute the view advanced here that if Beaumarchais was an applied rationalist he was also a man of feeling. He never outgrew his infatuation with the *drame bourgeois*, the new theatrical form designed to show that noble hearts can beat in middle-class rib-cages. *Eugénie* (1767) and *Les Deux Amis* (1772) may be better crafted than Diderot's dramas but they are no less silly. Beaumarchais never forsook the sentimentality which is the dominant mood of *La Mère coupable* in which the Richardsonian virtue of the 1760s acquires a "civic" veneer suitable to the times. Although *Le Barbier* and *Le Mariage* express Beaumarchais's free-flowing comic talents, even Figaro has moments of anguished self-doubt, which is nowhere more

clearly stated than in the celebrated monologue. Indeed, his self-confidence and effectiveness diminish noticeably throughout the trilogy. In *Le Barbier*, all his schemes work; in *Le Mariage*, his master-plan fails and he is reduced to improvisation; in *La Mère coupable*, Beaumarchais intervenes rather obviously to ensure his triumph. Pomeau rightly interprets his decline as a comment on the Enlightenment concept of reason (rather as *Les Liaisons dangereuses* warns that emotion is stronger than intelligence). He is not the first to detect twitches of pre-Romanticism in Figaro and in the complex manipulator who stood at his elbow.

But his Beaumarchais is equally a transitional figure in the history of theatre. His output may be variable in quality, but his clockwork-crafted and often provocative plays prefigure the melodrama of Scribe, the "théâtre utile" of 1830, the "well-made play" of Dumas fils, the thesis-theatre of Becque and the farces of Feydeau. Of course, well-made plays are better than badly made ones just as a theatre of ideas is arguably better than a theatre without ideas, but Beaumarchais's non-operative progeny have been decidedly second-rate. Though Pomeau writes convincingly in defence of the first two Figaro comedies, he finds little to commend in the rest and argues that Beaumarchais's weaknesses as a playwright are those of eighteenth-century theatre in general, which

history has treated badly. Voltaire's tragedies have sunk without trace and only Marivaux (with his knack of being periodically rediscovered) offers Figaro much of a challenge in the commercial theatre. Indeed, novels like *Jacques le Fataliste*, *Candide* and (in Christopher Hampton's excellent version) *Les Liaisons dangereuses* have proved far more stage-worthy than anything written for the stage in the Enlightenment.

Even so, Pomeau has a weakness for Beaumarchais. The plays are excellent spectacle, full of incident, charm and brilliant one-liners. But their abiding genius is their ability to project, with a vigour rare in any century, not only a charismatic personality but the duty to snarl at oppression. Figaro defends himself when attacked. He knows what is rightly his and has the wit to get it. He is Opposition Man and Guardian of Right. Guardian of the Right, too, in an indelibly French way, as Carlyle pointed out. Figaro is not a universal myth, like Faust or Don Juan, but a national type. In English, even in John Wells's recent lively translations for Radio 3, he barks more than he bites. In French, which is scarcely the language of diffidence, he is sharp as a razor. Ultimately, as René Pomeau argues in this lucid, well-stocked and splendidly readable book, the "Beaumarchais phenomenon" is a triumphant, good-humoured but uncompromising celebration of the spirit of freedom.

signified less inward piety or a respect for priests than an open contempt for democratic politics and values.

It is Higgs's contention that the nobility needs to be appreciated as more than just a constituent element of a wider upper class of *notables*. Nobles, he suggests, having recognized that they could no longer dominate as a ruling class, laboured, not without success, to diffuse their ideas among the country's new rulers, thereby maintaining the power of the noble mystique and establishing a social authority disproportionate to their numbers in the population. No one doubts the snob appeal of a title or the noble *particule*. Balzac added the "de" to his name in 1831, while the Gobieneau and Maupassant families did likewise around 1846. By the twentieth century the number of false titles outnumbered the genuine ones by three to one.

Higgs exaggerates, however, with his claim that the nineteenth-century nobility won a victory over the egalitarian message of the French Revolution when their conceptions of behaviour captured the minds of the most influential sections of the national élite. The *bourgeois conquérants* had no need of lessons in the practice of inegalitarianism from the nobility. Higgs himself furnishes ample evidence of how the material interests of the nobility and of the *grande bourgeoisie* fused to constitute those of a class which one might reasonably label as *notables*, who also shared basic beliefs with regard to property, the family, religion and social hierarchy, even if little personal sympathy or social contact united the worlds of noble and commoner.

At the other end of the social scale, Beff Press are to be congratulated on making available an English-language version of the abbreviated edition of Mme Perrot's distinguished doctoral dissertation on French strike activity 1871-90—the very model of a French *grande thèse* and already well known to scholars for its remarkable use of both archival source material and insights applied from other disciplines in the social sciences. (It is a pity, however, that the Anglophone reader is denied access to the author's extensive and sophisticated critique of evidence, while the characteristic French failure to provide an index is irritating.)

Nearly 3,000 strikes are analysed in a period when, between the crushing of the Paris Commune and the emergence of revolutionary syndicalism, French labour organizations were relatively weak. With the exception of the Decazville Strike of 1886, violence was not a major feature. Interestingly, Mme Perrot's researches confirm rather than diminish the value of *Germinal* as a document of social history.

## Vacillations of an age

Edward Timms

PETER STEPHAN JUNGK  
Franz Werfel: Eine Lebensgeschichte  
453pp. Frankfurt: S. Fischer. DM48.  
3100910265

"There is nowhere I belong," wrote Werfel in 1921 to his future wife Alma Mahler, "no city, no country, no age." This sense of displacement was something he shared with other German-Jewish writers from Prague after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Unlike his friend Franz Kafka, however, Werfel proved remarkably adept at adjusting to adverse circumstances. His spectacular literary successes were achieved in a period convulsed by wars and revolutions, culminating in the triumph of Nazism which forced him into exile. During his final years in the United States he was able to proclaim (in a radio broadcast): "I'm an American." But it is doubtful whether he ever resolved his crisis of identity, particularly the tension between his Jewish origins and the lure of the Catholic Church.

This new biography by Peter Stephan Jungk adopts a dispassionate approach, allowing documents and events to speak for themselves. Drawing freely on unpublished notebooks, diaries, letters and memoirs, he perceptively registers the ambiguities inherent in Werfel's literary career. And in italicized interludes at the end of each chapter he incorporates anecdotal material recorded during interviews with people who knew the Werfels well. The skill with which Jungk interweaves political events with the tensions and insecurities of Werfel's emotional life makes this an exemplary biography which deserves to find an English translator.

Werfel's *Der Welfreund* (1911), a Whitmanesque celebration of the brotherhood of man, made his reputation as the leading poet of the Expressionist generation. All too soon these idealistic aspirations were overtaken by the First World War, from which he emerged

with strong socialist sympathies. In republican Austria during the 1920s he embarked on a new phase in his career, distancing himself from his earlier Expressionist and socialist ideals and expressing a growing affinity with the Catholic Church. This led him during the 1930s to become an outspoken supporter of the authoritarian régimes of Dollfuss and Schuschnigg.

The ambiguity of his position is evident from his response in 1933 to Hitler's seizure of power. While left-wing authors like Heinrich Mann were being expelled from the Prussian Academy for Literature, Werfel signed a declaration of loyalty to the new régime. And even after some of his works had been destroyed in the Nazi book-burnings of May 1933, he still hoped to make his peace with the authorities. Describing himself as a "member of the German minority in Czechoslovakia", he applied in December 1933 for admission to the Nazi-fied Writers' Association. The irony is that at this date an Austrian publisher had just brought out his novel *The Forty Days of Musa Dagh*, which describes the persecution of the Armenians during the final years of the Ottoman Empire. The parallel with the persecution of the Jews was so obvious that this novel too was promptly banned by the Nazis. In the United States, however, it became a bestseller and made Werfel's reputation as a leading opponent of fascism.

After the German occupation of Austria in 1938, Werfel and his wife found refuge in the south of France. Their desperate plight after the defeat of France forms a moving episode in this biography. Werfel was high on the list of authors wanted by the Nazis. Anxious months were spent eluding the Vichy authorities while awaiting the visas that would enable them to escape through Spain to the United States. Despite the intervention of American relief organizations, Werfel and his wife were finally compelled to cross the mountainous border into Spain illegally on foot, with a group of other refugees (including Heinrich Mann). At

the nadir of his fortunes Werfel had spent five weeks at Lourdes, where he vowed to write a novel about the saintly Bernadette Soubirous, should he miraculously succeed in escaping. During his years in the United States it was this novel, *The Song of Bernadette*, which won him his greatest success and made him a wealthy man. His final years, however, were overshadowed not only by ill health, but also by allega-

found a man more pliant than her earlier partners—the composer Mahler, the painter Kokoschka and the architect Walter Gropius. Here was a writer of talent whose career could be moulded in accordance with her own ambitions. Werfel soon became emotionally dependent on her, even though he was already virtually betrothed to a young woman in Prague and she was still married to Gropius. And after a series of emotional traumas they became man and wife.

Removing Werfel from the influence of his disreputable coffee-house companions, Alma set him to work in the solitude of her villa on a series of major projects. She certainly deserves some credit for the way this gifted dilettante developed into a disciplined professional. But there was an ideological price to be paid. Under Alma's influence he repudiated the ideals of his youth with a vehemence which seemed to Kafka like the betrayal of a mission. And when her salon developed into a rallying-place for reactionary clericalism, with Schuschnigg a regular visitor, Werfel's position became even more equivocal. Intolerable tensions arose when Alma, who made no secret of her antisemitism, began to defend Franco and Hitler. Even in American exile she still provoked him into paroxysms of rage by arguing that reports about Nazi concentration camps were mere propaganda.

Werfel would have been less vulnerable to these insinuations if he had had a more stable sense of his own identity. But ever since childhood, when his parents had entrusted him to the care of a Catholic nanny, he had vacillated between Christian and Jewish allegiances. His great ambition as a writer was to demonstrate that the two traditions could be reconciled (in one of his plays we encounter St Francis of Assisi riding on a tandem with Ahasuerus, the Wandering Jew). This resulted in equivocations which became lamentably obvious when he was challenged by more radical thinkers like Martin Buber and Sigmund Freud. Even more embarrassing problems arose when he was



Werfel in Santa Margherita, about 1929—the photograph is taken from the book reviewed here.

tions that in making such concessions to Catholic sentiment he had betrayed his heritage as a Jew.

The irony of Werfel's situation was intensified by the fact that he was (as he ruefully acknowledged) "married to an antisemite". When Alma was first introduced to him in 1917, she described him in her diary as a "fat, bow-legged Jew". In Werfel, however, she

## From all walks of life

J. F. McMillan

EMILE ZOLA  
Carnets d'enquêtes: Une ethnographie  
Edited by Henri Mitterrand  
687pp. Paris: Plon. 170 fr.  
22591015409

DAVID HIGGS  
Nobles in 19th-Century France: The practice of inegalitarianism  
287pp. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. £23.55.  
0801830613

MICHELLE PERROT  
Workers on Strike: France, 1871-1890  
Translated by Chris Turner  
321pp. Leamington Spa: Berg. £26.  
0907582729

"Your Zola knows nothing: he invents it all in his study." So wrote Chekhov, and some historians have echoed his scepticism as to the accuracy of Zola's depiction of French social realities in his "realist" fiction. He could be anachronistic, as in *La Terre*, where he transposed the agricultural problems of the 1880s back into the 1860s. His need to moralize might be at odds with his aspirations to scientific detachment, as in *Thérèse Raquin*. And, as Chekhov was implying, his grasp of contemporary scientific theory was sometimes shaky. Nevertheless, it is well known that Zola engaged in extensive background research in pursuit of authenticity: *Germinal*, for instance, was preceded by a two-week tour of the northern mining region.

The publication of the *Carnets d'enquêtes* now allows us to appreciate the full extent of his preliminary investigations. Notebook after notebook was filled with first-hand information and observations, and literary scholars will doubtless want to compare this raw material with the finished works of art, the better to gain insights into the imagination and creative processes of a great writer. But social historians, too, will turn to the Zola notebooks as a new and fascinating source. At least one historian has already made good use of the manuscripts concerning the world of the *grands magasins* (so powerfully evoked in *Au Bonheur des dames*) and the publication of the whole corpus of texts, usefully grouped thematically rather than chronologically by the editor, can only stimulate others. Most of the notes derive from what Zola saw: others are based on what he heard, usually in conversation with well-placed informants. They are not mere *fiches*, but texts comparable to the preliminary sketches of painters, reports made *sur le vif*—valuable works in their own right.

The *carnets* cover two worlds: that of the



Millet's "Peasants Grafting a Tree", 1855, is reproduced from Patricia Mainardi's *Art and Politics of the Second Empire: The Universal Expositions of 1855 and 1867* (247pp. Yale University Press. £30.0300338712), which will be reviewed in a future issue of the TLS.

*honnêtes gens* ("secondaries"), according to Claude Lantier in *Le Ventre de Paris* and that of *le peuple*. In the "bourgeois century" it was understandable that much of Zola's energies should be directed towards studying the "respectable" middle classes and the power of money. Historians of the French bourgeoisie and of bourgeois values (still too few—workers are much better served, as in Michelle Perrot's *Workers on Strike*) will find plenty to interest them, even if Zola's own preoccupations are almost exclusively with the unedifying aspects of bourgeois life. On the subject of the *demi-monde* portrayed in *Nana*, he was criticized by fashionable *doulevardiers* for his ignorance ("a Parisian novel for provincials, but a provincial novel for Parisians", Aurélien Scholl called it). The preparatory dossier, however, reveals that Zola had gone to considerable lengths to inform himself about the milieu of the *coquilles*, mingling with them at the theatre and at the races, and noting down comments from some of their most devoted admirers (who included Lucien Hulévy, later indignant when the novel came to be regarded as a *roman à clef*).

The search for authenticity also took Zola into the popular quarters of Paris. *Le Ventre de Paris* was based upon a mass of precise and vivid details furnished by numerous walks around the markets of Les Halles. *L'Assom-*

*moir* drew on personal observations of the artists and *petits métiers* of old Montmartre. For *La Bête humaine*, he even got to fulfil the dream of every schoolboy by riding beside the engine-driver on the platform of a train. The *Notes sur Anzin* show how Zola came to curb his initial melodramatic impulses to depict striking miners as subhumans driven to violence and crime. Generously illustrated, not least with a selection of photographs taken by Zola himself, Henri Mitterrand's volume cannot fail to fascinate any student of nineteenth-century France.

Like Zola, historians have shown scant interest in the world of the nineteenth-century French nobility. David Higgs's *Nobles in 19th-Century France* does not altogether fill this historiographical gap, since it has little to say about nobles in the period after 1870, and Proust remains the best authority on the late nineteenth-century aristocracy. Higgs does, however, successfully make his point that nobles are worth studying in their own right, inasmuch as they retained a strong belief in their own distinctiveness, based upon a highly developed sense of family tradition, proclaimed in numerous genealogies and the cult of their ancestors. They also sought to maintain a separate way of life, notably in an exaggerated attachment to Catholicism, which

signified less inward piety or a respect for priests than an open contempt for democratic politics and values.

It is Higgs's contention that the nobility needs to be appreciated as more than just a constituent element of a wider upper class of *notables*. Nobles, he suggests, having recognized that they could no longer dominate as a ruling class, laboured, not without success, to diffuse their ideas among the country's new rulers, thereby maintaining the power of the noble mystique and establishing a social authority disproportionate to their numbers in the population. No one doubts the snob appeal of a title or the noble *particule*. Balzac added the "de" to his name in 1831, while the Gobieneau and Maupassant families did likewise around 1846. By the twentieth century the number of false titles outnumbered the genuine ones by three to one.

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Publication date: 23rd July

£40.00





## The French connection

Julian Hilton

HEINZ FISCHER  
Georg Büchner und Alexis Muston: Ein  
Büchner-Fund  
420pp. Munich: Fink. DM98.  
GEORG BÜCHNER  
The Complete Plays  
Translated by John Mackendrick  
Edited by Michael Patterson  
306pp. Methuen. Paperback, £3.95.  
0413 140 903

Since the appearance of his study *Georg Büchner: Untersuchungen und Marginalien* (1972), in which he published his discovery of Alexis Muston's sketches of Georg Büchner, Heinz Fischer has been working on the significance of the relationship between the two men. Now, on the 150th anniversary of Büchner's untimely death, Fischer brings us the fruit of his enquiries. The result shows both editorial and critical brilliance, and demonstrates that *Philologie* of the kind Büchner attracts in both Germany can be, as it too seldom is, at once detailed and accurate while also entertaining.

Büchner and Muston had much in common. They were gifted and polymathic students, combining their university work with literary and dramatic writing. Their friendship began in Strasbourg and deepened into intimacy, as Muston records, after they worked together for a week on the Waldenser papers in the Darmstadt archive. Their careers ran parallel until Büchner's death: within a few months of Büchner's persecution and flight into France, assistant Pastor Muston was forced out of his native Piedmont to take refuge in France as well. Muston lived on in France till 1888, dying a pastor in the Waldenser church, much loved by his congregation.

The focus of Fischer's study is Muston's student diary, which throws light on several aspects of Büchner's life and works – the direct descriptions and portraits of Büchner, the link with Hugo, two of whose plays Büchner translated, and the ancestry of the Fool figure in *Woyzeck*, based, at least in part, on the Strasbourg character Karl, whom Muston introduces us to for the first time. Karl is, as Fischer convincingly argues, a model not just for his counterpart in *Woyzeck*, but for Woyzeck himself. A marginal figure in society, a blend of fairy-tale goblin and embodied alienation, he came to seem what Büchner imagined Woyzeck to be – beyond the reach of life or death.

The diary is well worth reading in its own right. It is written in sharp, lyrical and colloquial French not unlike Büchner's German, peppered with anecdotes in direct speech and with Muston's thoughts on love, life and the search for a wife. His description of an incident between a young girl and a showman at a fair reminds one forcibly of the fair scene in *Woyzeck*. Muston shares Büchner's love for nature and for walks in the romantic ambience of the Vosges and the Odenwald, where he sketched Büchner. Both idolize Oberlin, Shakespeare and Goethe, Muston paying Büchner the ultimate compliment by describing his forehead as even finer than Goethe's.

What emerges reinforces our sense of the influence on Büchner of Strasbourg in particular, and of French ideas and culture in general. "C'est en effet la patrie de mon intelligence que cette ville où l'étude m'a transformé et saisi pour la vie", writes Muston of Strasbourg. No other city, as Muston himself records, has such a place in German culture as the French city of Strasbourg. As Fischer argues, Hugo's pursuit of an aesthetic at once grotesque and sublime catches well the mood of *Woyzeck*, so

that Büchner's translations of Hugo, relatively neglected by scholars, may hold more clues to the development of his own writing. Equally fascinating, if more elusive, is the possibility of religious influences on Büchner stemming from Muston. We know the Büchner family had land in the Waldenser parishes near Darmstadt. We know that Hugo was affected by Muston's beliefs, which may testify to Muston's eloquence and commitment. We know too from Caroline Schulz's diary of Büchner's fatal illness, that Büchner's last words suggest a return to faith. What better articles for such faith than those of the persecuted and exiled Waldensers?

One grouse: the diary is printed as a parallel text, the French on the left, the German translation on the right. The notes are inserted after each of the manuscript sections, with the result that they are both embedded into the text and span across the two pages. This has the effect of making it impossible to read the diary straight through, and gives the notes the same visual status as the text. Fischer and Muston both write so well that it might have been wiser to have made a longer introductory essay, incorporating the main arguments, while allowing the supporting material to be printed as conventional foot or end-notes. One wish: that an enterprising German publisher will ask Fischer to write a new critical study of Büchner's plays, a work which on this evidence he is uniquely equipped to write.

Heinz Fischer's work is a fine tribute to Büchner's memory. Another such example is the new *Complete Plays*, edited by Michael Patterson. A must for any student of Büchner who does not read German, it brings together for the first time in English the full range of Büchner's writing, including some letters and extracts from his scientific and philosophical work.

commissioned by an American theatre manager in 1934 to write a spectacular biblical drama about the destiny of the Jews. In the first version of the play a Christ-like figure appears to console the Jews for the destruction of the Temple. When it was explained to Werfel that this ending would jeopardize the success of the play with the New York Jewish community, he revised the final scene to eliminate the Christian implications.

This lack of integrity clearly undermines Werfel's achievement. On his arrival as a refugee in New York in 1940 he found memorable words to describe the war against Nazi Germany as a "war of religion" in which "all democratic forces must unite to save Jewry" and thereby prevent a regression into barbarism. But in Hollywood in 1942 we find him arguing that Catholicism is the only spiritual force of any significance. The Jews should realize that they are destined to become "a people as superfluous as the Poles or the Bulgarians". Such contradictions are recorded by Jungk without comment, although he does note that by 1942 sales of *The Song of Bernadette* were approaching half a million.

Werfel emerges from this admirable biography as an incongruous figure – a writer gifted with brilliant insights who lacked the overall control to sustain them. The clearest summing-up is offered by the critic Hans Mayer, whose memories of Werfel (recorded by Jungk) date back to the 1920s: "He could be a Marxist, he could be an anarchist or conservative, he could be a Catholic – everything was interchangeable, it depended on the impulse, the idea, the emotion of the moment." This judgment may seem harsh, but it helps to explain why Werfel's career remains significant even though his work is dated. For his writings provide a sound-board which resonates with the conflicts and confusions of his age.

## Fortunes of the unimportant

G. P. Butler

JEFFREY L. SAMMONS  
*Wilhelm Raabe: The fiction of the alternative community*  
421pp. Guildford: Princeton University Press.  
£30.  
0691 067090

To those who know him at all well, it will hardly come as a surprise to find Wilhelm Raabe presented as "the major . . . novelist in the German language between Goethe and Theodor Fontane", or even as "the most ingenious experimenter in narrative perspective in post-Romantic German literature" – provided the post-Romantic era is not seen to extend indefinitely. What is surprising is that these views, and all that is entailed in arriving at them, should now, so late in the day, be so handsomely displayed to a readership evidently thought to consist in the main of monolingual Anglophones.

Jeffrey L. Sammons's *Wilhelm Raabe* is a scholarly, entertaining, for the most part plain-speaking and persuasive introduction to the achievements of a remarkable writer whom, though idolized by some, people "generally familiar with nineteenth-century European literature may never have heard of". They may not have because, for one thing and for whatever reason, little of his work has been translated, and very little into English. Sammons smooths the way by providing translations – and generally nothing but translations – of the German material he deploys; and when particularly recommending two of Raabe's tales, "Zum wilden Mann" and "Unruhige Gäste", as "among the peaks of his artistic achievement", he acknowledges that "their translation into English would be an interesting and welcome experiment". In fact it would not only be welcome; if Raabe's future readership is to include those who truly need the linguistic calipers they get in Sammons's book, it would of course be essential.

Wilhelm Raabe (1831–1910) was one of the few men of German letters, perhaps the only one, ever to make a reasonable living exclusively as a writer of fiction. By 1902, when he ceased writing, he had produced twenty-nine novels, one novel fragment, and thirty-eight

"stories" and novellas. His first publication, *Die Chronik der Sperlingsgasse* (1856), and his twenty-fourth, *Der Hungerpastor* (1863–4), both novels, are probably still his best known; but his later work, notably that written after the Franco-Prussian War, when he had settled for good in his native Braunschweig, is nowadays held in higher regard. The youngest of the so-called poetic or "bürgerlich" realists (Stifter, Storm, Keller, C.F. Meyer . . .) whose shorter prose bulks so large in histories of literature, he was also the writer of the day whom the title "novelist" fitted best – certainly until well beyond 1878, when the ageing Fontane (1819–98) began to publish novels too, and arguably until at least the turn of the century. Fontane's contributions to the genre were comparatively few; and even when they ceased, with *Der Stechlin* (1898), the Mann brothers' day was barely dawning.

From start to finish, in a wide variety of largely German settings, past and present, Raabe's attention focuses on the fortunes of fictional people "of no importance" – the estimable yet unobtrusive, the underprivileged, the eccentric – exposed to a predominantly shallow, inimical, materialistic world. His view of this world was tempered by a readiness to laugh, by compassion, and by a wry acceptance of the absence of prospects for change. Digressive, allusive and structurally complex, his prose reflects his attachment to various eighteenth and nineteenth-century English novelists, above all, it's often said, Dickens, although Sammons gives the edge to Thackeray.

In "In Search of Raabe", the first section of the book, the questing consists of a compact biography (seen from outside, Raabe led an uneventful life), an account of the writer's relationship with his public, a succinct analysis of his pessimism, and, finally, a disarmingly frank discussion of the factors that have helped keep his readership relatively small. "The Case Against Raabe": It is a strong case. Sammons makes no bones about, for example, "Raabe's inextinguishably verbose and garrulous manner", "his problem with symbolism", his "uneventfulness", "assertive repetitiveness" and "patches of sentimentality or sentimentousness". But he concludes "we can live with these faults . . . if they are counterbalanced, as I believe they are, with 'imaginative' ingenuity" and "artistic

strengths".

Unquestionably it's time we learned to live with what was made of Raabe earlier this century by his active idolaters, those who made capital out of him during the rise and fall of the Third Reich. In the publications of "The Society of Friends of Wilhelm Raabe", founded in 1910 and at one point second in size only to the Goethe Society, Sammons identifies budding fascist attitudes long before 1933, blossoming during the Hitler period; and certain friends were slow to change tack even after 1945. In context, as expressed in print, Raabe's pro-Germanness was in fact natural enough and not intemperate (and his hostility towards Social Democracy little more than a corollary of his allegiance to Bismarck). But such sentiments were exploitable, and by none more readily, in post-imperial Germany, than by the literate bourgeois who relished their elders' resentful patriotism and who helped put paid to Weimar.

In the second section, "Themes", Sammons gives us well-documented and, all in all, uncontroversial surveys under self-explanatory titles such as "Politics" and "History". "Humor" is necessarily less straightforward, but Sammons's emphasis on satire as the core of Raabe's comedy makes good sense, even if the odd judgment may be overstated ("the fact that he is one of the funniest writers in German literature" is unlikely to go unchallenged). "Literature" concentrates on the writer's literary likes and dislikes and their possible impact on what and how he wrote; if his narrative technique, "the 'ideal' issue of contemporary Raabe criticism", is to be likened to that of any single book among the hundreds he is known to have known, pride of place must go to *Pendennis*. "Narrators" makes it clear, however, that, influential though "Thackerayan devices" appear to have been as Raabe's story-telling evolved, he was no mere mimic: his versatility – particularly in mingling conventional modes of narrative – put him in a class of his own, and his development of the "unreliable" first-person narrator, in the interests of realism, was virtually unprecedented.

"The Delicate Family", the penultimate theme, sketches the conventional Victorian view, which dominated Raabe's middle-class reality, of the sanctity and socio-political value of family life – a view typified by the opinions of

not the behaviour of Riehl, Storm, Stifter, Vischer – and highlights the familial failings and failures that throng his fiction: "it appears that whatever can go wrong in a family goes wrong in Raabe". And the ambiguous subtitle of *Wilhelm Raabe* itself then serves to head a surprisingly short tail-piece: "The Fiction of the Alternative Community" characterizes the self-protective and mutually protective responses of some of Raabe's most sympathetic, humane, vulnerable figures not just to domestic distress but to the harshness of life and society in general.

To attempt a summary of Sammons's interpretative arguments, insights and enthusiasms in the section "Interpretations" would be to do them an injustice. Sammons acknowledges at the outset that no single approach to the texts, however fangled, could serve his purpose, that "a certain amount of groping for the right perspective may be evident". Grope he may, and may have had to, but he reaches his verdicts along paths that are rarely less than well defined and in terms that seem never less than candid. The verdict on *Die Akten des Vogelwangs* (1896), for instance, "the finest work of a great career, an outstanding late nineteenth-century novel of European stature", may be seen to comprise both commendation and warning:

Like [Thomas] Mann, and unlike Balzac or Flaubert and their . . . progeny, Raabe does not pour scorn on the bourgeoisie from the aristocratic height of artistic sensibility, but honestly recognizes the irreducible bourgeois component of his own consciousness.

Whether Raabe tops any list of candidates for belated-discovery will ultimately depend on his accessibility, thematic as well as linguistic. It can be argued that his world – notably the class society he belonged to and presented with such exuberance and such a complex mixture of acerbity, affection and amusement – has by now receded even further than that of some of his celebrated seniors, which is already beyond reach in one way or another. *Wilhelm Raabe* constitutes a powerful counter-argument: it may not win the day, but it deserves to be heeded. Whether Victorianism is on the way back or not, the vividness and charm and feel of more than a few Victorian writers, however bound by place and time, can still enrich us. There should now be little doubt that Raabe is one of them.

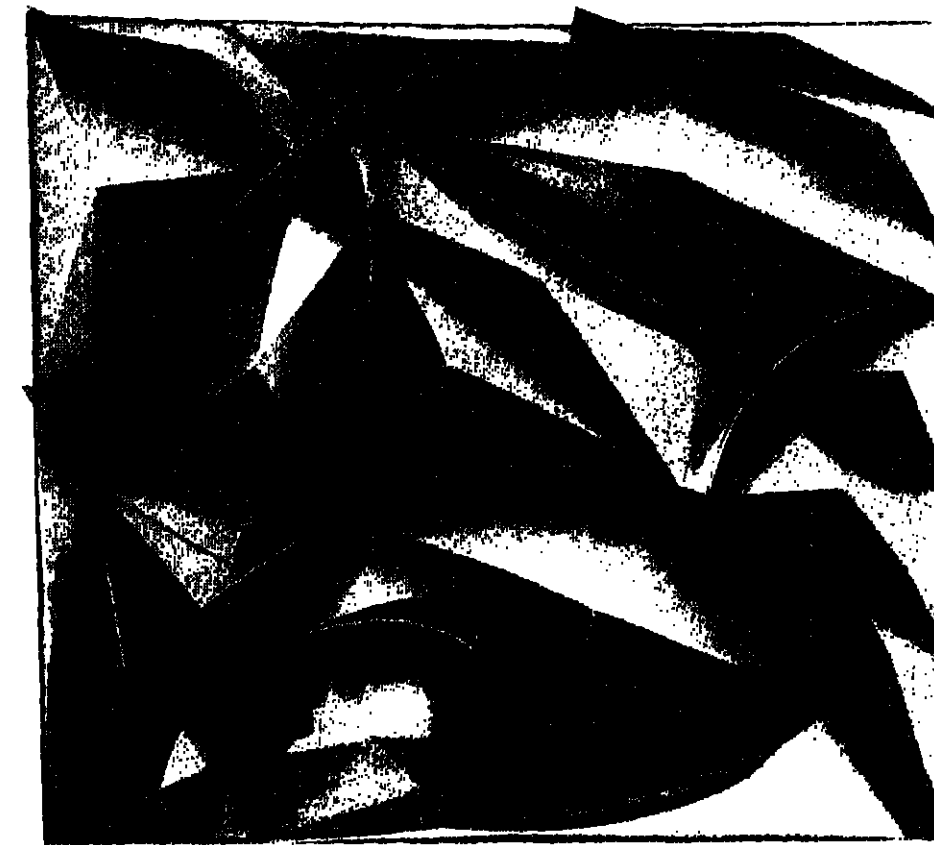
## The living wardrobe

Roger Cardinal

PONTUS HULTEN, (Editor)  
*Futurism and Futurisms*  
638pp. Thames and Hudson. £45.  
0300 234892  
ENRICO CRISPOLTI  
*Il futurismo e la moda: Balla e gli altri*  
280pp. Venice: Marsilio.  
88317 49382

Casual contact with Futurism might lead to the assumption that, of all European avant-garde movements in the early twentieth century, it was especially designed to go up like a rocket and burn out fast. "Quick, give me the whole thing in two words!" wrote Marinetti in a famous manifesto celebrating the "acceleration of life" and the sensation of "the earth shrunk by speed". Yet, if Futurism cultivated urgency, a disdain for lingering, in fact the actual breadth, depth and durability of its influence are considerable, bearing comparison for instance with those of Expressionism (with which in any case it coincides at several points). Within Italy, the foremost arena for Futurist activity, the First World War interrupted the movement in so far as it killed off two major exponents, the sculptor Boccioni and the architect Antonio Sant'Elia; nevertheless, after 1919, there ensued a long secondary phase which, while scarcely less militant, may be seen as a period of consolidation and even of absorption into the cultural mainstream.

*Futurism and Futurisms* is the catalogue of the 1986 inaugural exhibition at the Palazzo Grassi in Venice, organized by Pontus Hultén. It is a weighty reference work comprising over a thousand illustrations (almost 70 per cent in colour) and a 200-page "Dictionary of Futurism" which generously acknowledges the full international sweep of the movement: there are entries highlighting activities in Belgium, Czechoslovakia, England (Bomberg, Wyndham Lewis), France (the Delaunays), Ger-



Balla's steel plate on wood reconstruction of his "Plastic Ensemble of Wood + Speed", 1914. It is reproduced from the catalogue to the Balla Futurist exhibition, reviewed in last week's TLS and to be remounted at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford, from October 25 to December 6.

many (Marc), Japan, Mexico, Poland, the United States (Stella), Russia (Goncharova, Malevich, Larionov), and Sweden, as well as Italy. Many of the celebrated Italian manifestos are given in full within the entry devoted to their author. A welcome adjunct to the obvious biographies are thematic essays with headings such as "Automobile", "City", "Clothing" or "Speed". Especially stimulating are Massimo Carrà's entry under "Religion", which argues that Futurism is rooted in novelty-seeking Gnosticism; Enrico Crispolti's

analysis of the resonances of the important 1915 manifesto by Giacomo Balla and Fortunato Depero entitled *Futurist Reconstruction of the Universe*; and Renzo de Felice's "Ideology", a sensitive account of the often conflicting conceptual patterns thrown up by Futurism and of its regrettable yet far from comfortable alignment with Fascism.

Futurism was not alone among avant-garde movements of its time in wanting to transform not just art but everyday life, yet it was surely the one which went furthest in its overt concern

to assert itself across the widest spectrum. There is the Futurism of painting, sculpture and assemblage; of poetry, drama and the happening; of music and choreography; of photography and cinema; of typography and publicity. There is the Futurism of political and cultural theory, of architecture and urban planning, as well as of theatrical décor, interior decoration and furniture design. There were even Futurist interventions in the fields of toymaking (as with Balla and Depero's suggestions for fantastic and aggressive toys suitable for both children and adults), of cuisine (as with Marinetti's motion to abolish pasta), and, finally, of fashion design.

In his *Il futurismo e la moda*, Enrico Crispolti starts from the premise that to design people's clothes is one of the most direct ways of influencing their daily lives. Certainly men's fashion at the turn of the century had lapsed into a stereotype that it was easy to deride as decadent and passé. Taking the *Reconstruction of the Universe* as a touchstone, Crispolti identifies Balla as the pre-eminent theorist and exponent of a philosophy of dress committed to change and novelty, and "una sorta de parossismo inventivo di sempre nuove soluzioni formali fantastiche" (a kind of inventive paroxysm of eternally innovative, formally fantastic solutions). Clothes make the man, and no doubt Balla felt the urge to extend Futurist sensations from the canvas to the fabric, thereby thrusting the colours and rhythms of the Futurist aesthetic out of the gallery and on to the city street. His 1914 manifesto *Il vestito antineutrale* (Anti-neutral dress) calls for the abolition of all that is timidly symmetrical and funereal in men's wear, and instead proposes a "living plastic complex" in the form of a loose, asymmetric garment with a single huge lapel, cut from material decorated in dazzling abstractions. This Futurist suit was designed to project vitality, acting as a sign both of a general ideology of the New and the Dynamic, and of the personality of the individual wearer. (Balla specifically sketched different versions of the suit for

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Marinetti, Boccioni and the poet Francesco Cangiullo; the latter is known to have worn his at a demonstration in Rome in December 1914.)

The contribution of Balla's associate Depero lay largely in the areas of interior furnishing and theatrical costume. He had worked in both in New York, had designed costumes for Stravinsky's *Le Chant du rossignol*, and produced fanciful marionettes in a somewhat geometric style for his own *Buñi plastici*. But if scenic experimentation dominates Depero's work, his name is cited high on the list of Futurist fashion designers because of his notorious waistcoats, vibrant in colour and assembled from multiple sections. A photograph of Depero and Marinetti taken in Turin in 1924 shows two bowler-hatted dandies whose truculence and eccentricity are a little dampened by the fact that each dazzling waistcoat is framed by the sober cut of a traditional dark suit.

While the Italian Futurists did achieve some success in terms of full-scale outfits, as witness Ernesto Thyahit's pioneering one-piece overall, the *tuta* (which seriously reflected some of the principles tossed out in Balla's febrile writings, notably the qualities of comfortable looseness and adaptability), their most radical and inventive departures seem rather to focus upon accessories – waistcoats, neck-ties, hats, handbags and scarves. In an abundant illustrative section, Crispolti reviews some of these fanciful designs, which include the triangular neck-ties patterned by Balla in the manner of his 1912 "iridescent interpenetration" paintings; the aerodynamic cup with adjustable visor (the very thing for the Futurist motorist) proposed by Mino Delle Site in 1932; Balla's flat handbags which look like sections snipped from his canvases; and his whimsical *modificanti*, loose pieces of fabric which one was invited to button to one's suit at various points, thereby to modify and multiply its effect. Rather like the neck-tie and the waistcoat, women's dresses seem conceived only as casual

extras to be discarded after brief displays at beach, golf-course or soirée – although it must be said that the fresh hues and daring lines of Mario Guidi Dal Monte, or the graceful multi-colours and geometric-metallic cut of Tullio Cralli possess a lasting flair that belies the sense of fashion as merely a succession of staccato shocks.

None the less, the limitations of Futurist design at large are perhaps revealed here. Being so ideologically committed to overturning the orthodoxy of sobriety, equilibrium and uniformity of tone, the Futurists tended to suppress the natural shape of the body and to treat it as simply another sort of case on which to spread extravagant zigzags and kaleidoscopic patterns. In practice, few people seemed prepared to dress up as Futurists all day long. Hence the true influence of Futurism in fashion tended to affect trimmings and knick-knacks which allow people to signal their singularity in relatively modest ways. Thus to sport that Del Monte speciality, the "anti-craquelé" made out of shiny, supple metal, would be to create a sufficient sensation, whereas a complete suit of the same material would be a troublesome bore.

And yet, if Futurist design may be said to have been more utopian than practical, it remains the case that certain innovative gestures – like Balla's two-tone leather shoes, or Cralli's collarless jacket with a single button – were injected into the mainstream, to contribute to the evolution of fashion at large. The fact that Futurists like Depero and Enrico Prampolini successfully ran their own fashion houses, and that features like startling colour combinations or a cut which flamboyantly overrides the contours of the body are still hallmarks of novelty within the fashion world in Italy and elsewhere, should make it possible, even if only impressionistically, to make a case for seeing Futurism as having achieved, in this respect at least, a significant part of its improbable aim of bringing modern man to a fuller consciousness of the adventure of his life.



A detail from Nolde's "Slidseekrigger" (South Seas Warriors) reproduced from the book reviewed below.

## A loner and his time

S. S. Prawer

MARTIN URBAN

Emil Nolde: Catalogue raisonné of the oil paintings  
Volume One: 1895-1914  
604pp. Sotheby. £97.50.  
085667 320 X

This meticulously documented and handsomely illustrated catalogue enables us to trace the development of Emil Nolde, the most powerful colourist of German Expressionism; his early fascination by the grotesque; his northern landscapes, visual equivalents of the poetry of Theodor Storm; his brief flirtation with Impressionism leading to that strong reaction against it which produced his characteristic contrasts of massed colours applied with a deliberate disregard of depth perspective; the new ways he found in landscape and flower painting, and in the finest cloud studies since Constable; his approach to the *Brücke* artists, which produced his justly famous portrait of Schmidt-Rottluff; the crisis in his health, a hard night of body and soul, from which emerged the most memorable sequence of paintings on biblical themes in modern German art; the spell cast upon him by the "primitive" art he encountered on his journey to the South Seas, which translates itself into new and even bolder effects of colour and expressive distortion, and a new visual vocabulary; his original variations on themes by Ensor and Van Gogh; his anticipations of the horrors of war under the impact of the Agadir crisis; the sheer intensity of his work throughout, which often expresses itself in joyously luminous depictions of lovers, dancers, mothers and children. Here is richness indeed; an impressive monument to the work of a strongly original artist, who also stood unmistakably in an "expressive" tradition of art that runs from Grünewald to Munch, and who could not escape the sickness of his time; a loner who again and again sought a community with which to identify – the farmers and fishermen in his native region, the Berlin Secession, the New Secession, the artists of *Die Brücke*, a "racially pure" Germany freed from "alien" artistic influences, and (alas) the Nazi party which so decisively rejected him when it came to power; a subject to which I will return.

Martin Urban has been Director of the Nolde Foundation, idyllically housed at Seebüll near the Danish border with Germany, since 1963. This means that he has had access, not only to by far the largest collection of Emil Nolde's paintings and drawings anywhere in the world, but also to a mass of documents that help determine the gestation and subsequent fate of these works. The most important of these documents are the handlists kept by Nolde and his wife in preparation for precisely such a catalogue as that whose first volume has now appeared. What the artist asked for was a "practical data": owner, year of origin, measurements, signature, and "a short description of each painting". By "short description" he meant mainly the colours used, including those of the signatures which he integrated into the paintings.

Occasionally (the English titles the catalogue supplies fail to render the full force of the German originals. True enough, "Gesellschaft" of 1911 depicts a "party"; but the word also means "society", and it was often used by contemporary German sociologists in opposition to "Gemeinschaft", which designated a supposedly more "organic" "community". For the rest, however, Dr Urban has done Nolde proud; and the second, concluding volume of his catalogue raisonné, it is eagerly awaited.

The *Deum*. In *Grove*, Elgar, for example, is allotted seven times the space given Mascagni; in the *Deum*, Mascagni (by Carlo Parentola) triumphs, if only slightly, over Elgar (Edward Neill). The entry on London is nine times as long as the entry on Milan in *Grove*; in the *Deum*, London (John Harley) is covered in nine columns, Milan (Guido Salvetti) in sixteen. Giorgio Pestelli, in his article on the harpsichord, dismisses the keyboard music of Matthew Locke, Jeremiah Clarke, William Croft and John Blow, and highly praises that of Alessandro Scarlatti and Domenico Zipoli – which will shock many an English-speaking musician and scholar. But these natural shifts in emphasis and viewpoint in no way disguise *Deum*'s fundamentally cosmopolitan profile: Italian scholars have contributed many of the articles on foreign musicians and foreign scholars have been chosen to deal with such sacrosanct native subjects as Bellini and the Gabriellis.

## The music's the thing

John Rosselli

JAMES A. HEPOKOSKI  
Giuseppe Verdi: Otello  
209pp. Cambridge University Press. £22.50  
(paperback, £7.95).  
0521 25885 5

*The Constant Nymph*, a fair guide to middle-brow attitudes in the 1920s, shows a set of advanced artists all agog to hear a performance of *Otello*; this at a time when even in Germany the "Verdi renaissance" was barely under way, and many thought *Trovatore* fit for barrel organs. *Otello* (1887) is the one work of Verdi's later years that has always held both a popular and an intellectual audience. At worst – as William Ashbrook brings out in a contribution to this new Cambridge Opera Handbook – performances thinned out early this century because tenors hesitated to measure themselves in the formidable title part against memories of the clarion-voiced Francesco Tamagno. Now any decent production fills the house; under its impact few, one imagines, worry about the opera's Shakespearean credentials.

Not that James Hepokoski takes this or anything else for granted. He studies all aspects of the work: its seven-year gestation, the veteran composer alternating between surges of creative vigour and periods of doubt; the many revisions, some made to suit the original Desdemona's voice, others more radical like the deep cut worked (for Paris in 1894) in the Act Three finale, the one large-scale concession to inherited Italian forms; Verdi's belief in one unchallengeable interpretation, as shown both in his comments and in the elaborate production book which he approved; the musical organization of the work, analysed in detail through a section-by-section breakdown of Act Two, an Act which is still one of the most shattering of experiences in the theatre; finally, the marked literary pretensions of Arrigo Boito's libretto, the version of Shakespeare it mediated, and the interplay of both with Verdi's late resources of originality, pithiness and cunning. The result is a distinguished critical essay, searching in its analysis. Some may think it gives too much space to detecting variants and revisions (through such clues as the use of

purple ink), but one can skip; the musical analysis should have a good deal to say even to the technically unqualified, as in the remark that Iago manipulates tonality as he manipulates the other characters, or in the epigrammatic account of Verdi's procedure in "Ora e per sempre addio" – "the brutal stifling of an implied reprise".

And Shakespeare? Boito's text has until lately earned praise from English-speaking critics, thanks chiefly to his handling of structure, a matter of "creative condensation" and dovetailing. Even this, as Hepokoski shows, is not beyond question: the climax is made to come rather early and there is a danger that by mid-opera *Otello* will have "prematurely weakened himself by overreacting in consistently similar ways"; little evidence is left of his capacity for calm and self-control. In this Boito followed the Romantic interpretation of A. W. Schlegel, carried on by the leading Italian actors Ernesto Rossi and Tommaso Salvini, which stressed *Otello*'s blackness and savagery. Then Boito's language moved the play into the turbid waters of *fin-de-siècle* aestheticism – a "non-spontaneous language curved in on itself with the connoisseur's relish of learned tricks and 'objective' wordplay". Its crown is Iago's Credo, an interpolation which Verdi accepted as "completely Shakespearean" but which runs uncomfortably close to the boulevard diabolism of its date: Hysmans and Wilde are not far off, or even Marie Corelli.

In performance, though, little of this matters. Many of Boito's choice epithets go by unheard. We are put off momentarily when *Otello* takes time (in his reminiscence at the start of the love duet) to let go a parenthetical frigid conceit ("orribil edera", "dreadful ivy", to describe himself and his fellow-soldiers scaling the battlements); the younger Verdi, who bent librettists to his will, would have cut that, but he stood in some awe of Boito the literary man. For the most part, however, the music carries all before it; it knows little or nothing of aestheticism. "Esultate", *Otello*'s brief entrance arioso, can – as Hepokoski acknowledges – do all that is needed to establish his heroic standing. Verdi was nothing if not direct: "sheer force of personality overwhelms the text even while honouring it". Verdi became Shakespearean by being himself.

## Grove of Italy

Harvey Sachs

ALBERTO BASSO (Editor)  
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Rilescio  
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88 02 037329; 88 02 037043;  
88 02 038333; 88 02 038201  
Le biografie  
Four volumes (of projected eight), 3,069pp.  
88 02 039305; 88 02 039313;  
88 02 040419; 88 02 040575  
Turin: UTET.

Different goals and different achievements distinguish the new Italian *Dizionario enciclopedico universale della musica e dei musicisti* (*Deum*) from *The New Grove*, which remains the touchstone among current music encyclopaedias. Under the general directorship of Alberto Basso – author of an important recent study of Bach – the *Deum*'s 37,000 entries are for the most part intended as succinct summaries of extant scholarship, not as new contributions or interpretations. Most of the entries have been written by a carefully chosen editorial staff rather than by outside experts, although there are more than 300 contributors from thirty countries.

The *Deum*'s first two volumes appeared in 1983; two have been added each year, and the twelve-volume set is scheduled for completion late in 1988, thus replacing the UTET's smaller music encyclopaedia of twenty years ago. The new set is divided into a four-volume topical section, already complete, and an eight-volume biographical dictionary, half of which has now been published.

National tastes and achievements account for some of the differences between *Grove* and

the *Deum*. In *Grove*, Elgar, for example, is allotted seven times the space given Mascagni; in the *Deum*, Mascagni (by Carlo Parentola) triumphs, if only slightly, over Elgar (Edward Neill). The entry on London is nine times as long as the entry on Milan in *Grove*; in the *Deum*, London (John Harley) is covered in nine columns, Milan (Guido Salvetti) in sixteen. Giorgio Pestelli, in his article on the harpsichord, dismisses the keyboard music of Matthew Locke, Jeremiah Clarke, William Croft and John Blow, and highly praises that of Alessandro Scarlatti and Domenico Zipoli – which will shock many an English-speaking musician and scholar. But these natural shifts in emphasis and viewpoint in no way disguise *Deum*'s fundamentally cosmopolitan profile: Italian scholars have contributed many of the articles on foreign musicians and foreign scholars have been chosen to deal with such sacrosanct native subjects as Bellini and the Gabriellis.

The volumes are marred by some careless errors, notably in the short, unsigned entries on living performers: Vladimir Ashkenazy, for instance, is not active in Russia – he hasn't been heard there for nearly twenty-five years – nor is he well known as a performer of contemporary music. James Levine was not the Cleveland Orchestra's principal conductor from 1964 to 1970 or at any other time; in 1975 he became the Metropolitan Opera's Music Director, not its Artistic Director – a position he assumed in 1986. Carlos Kleiber made his debut at La Scala in 1976, not 1977, and first conducted *Otello* there later in 1976, not in 1978. These are minute mistakes, but they inevitably shake one's confidence. Still, the high quality of *Deum*'s signed articles makes it a major reference tool for our day and proves that contemporary Italian musicology need not fear comparison with that of other countries.

## Temperamental problems

Robert Donington

JEAN DENIS  
Treatise on Harpsichord Tuning  
Translated and edited by Vincent J. Panetta, Jr.  
128pp. Cambridge University Press. £25  
(paperback, £8.95).  
0521 306280

This treatise, written around 1650, is an addition to the wide range of baroque books on baroque music now currently available, of which the value is not only scholarly but also practical, leading us as they do towards the very inwardness of the music. The text here translated, introduced and edited by Vincent Panetta, though useful, is not in itself particularly important. It is a brief and decidedly confused account, chiefly though not only concerning temperament: that is to say the choice between many possible methods of adjusting the unavoidable irregularities of our acoustic intervals to suit as well as possible the musical purposes in hand. We nowadays ordinarily use equal temperament, which solves all problems by a compromise acceptable because of the tolerance of our aural capacities for small though undeniable mistunings. But there are better solutions, at the cost of restricting the keys even moderately acceptable, while greatly improving those keys in which each such system is designed to work. It makes a difference musically, so that the main subject of this book is relevant for all those who are interested in hearing baroque music as it was meant to be heard; but it is a specialized topic, unsatisfactorily treated by the unsophisticated

Jean Denis.

What redeems the little volume, however, is the excellence of the editing, which fills in the entire background by comparing the book with other contemporary treatises of indisputable importance. The gaps are bridged by the annotations, so that the illumination becomes as bright as the subject readily allows. One cannot praise too highly the breadth of Panetta's information and the depth of his perception.

The translation has been prepared with obvious attention to that foremost of scholarly requirements: literal accuracy rather than inspired transcription. It cannot have been easy here. There is an instructive appendix of parallel passages from the published writings of Jean Denis and Marin Mersenne, a very extensive bibliography, and an intelligent index of ample scope. In short, a good specimen of an interesting series.

*Music for Treviso Cathedral in the Late Sixteenth Century: A reconstruction of the lost manuscripts 29 and 30* (162pp. London: Royal Music Association. £15. 0947854 02 9) by Bonnie J. Blackburn is a meticulous attempt to reconstruct two of twenty-five manuscripts of polyphonic music written before 1630 which were destroyed in Treviso Cathedral by an allied incendiary bomb during a raid in 1944. Dr Blackburn has been helped in her task by Giovanni D'Alessi, whose book on the musical establishment of Treviso Cathedral was completed a week before the raid, and by the discovery of photographs of compositions from the two manuscripts.

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## Barging into the Bible

Robert Irwin

NAOMI SHEPHERD  
*The Zealous Intruders: The Western Rediscovery of Palestine*  
282pp. Collins. £15.  
0002174324

In the early nineteenth century, when the Orient was still changeless, Palestine appeared as a particularly sacred, unchanging patch, protected by despotism, fanaticism and poverty from the ravages of progress. It did indeed seem to the Western traveller that the Holy Land had lain under a curse since the Crucifixion and the destruction of the Second Temple. The obstructive and fanatical locals were regularly compared by him to the Philistines and Canaanites who had opposed the Chosen People, and the underpopulated towns on his journey were like so many dusty sepulchres. The traveller contemplated the ruins of the Herodians and the Crusaders and then consulted his copy of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall* or Volney's *Les Ruines* on the correct form that his mournful meditation should take. It was reported that the ruins of Sodom and Gomorrah could be glimpsed under the turbid surface of the Dead Sea. In this oriental desolation only the hunter could be really happy. Pheasants flew so low over the hills of Galilee that they could be knocked down with a stick, wild boar could be hunted in the marshes by Lake Huleh and flamingos shot over Kishon. Changeless poverty and desolation was of course deplorable, but it was also desirable, for it allowed the pilgrim and the biblical scholar to see what Samuel saw and to walk with the Apostles. With only the slightest rearrangement of their robes, Palestinian bedouin and shopkeepers could be photographed reenacting scenes from the Bible.

By the late nineteenth century it was coming to be understood that Palestine was not changeless at all. In 1881, in the pages of the *Survey of Western Palestine*, the French archaeologist Clermont-Ganneau warned, "It will be too late when, on the spot where the cry of Rachel mourning for her children still lingers, we hear in mocking echo the shrill scream of the railway whistle, and the loud shout of 'Bethlehem! Dix minutes d'arrêt! Les voyageurs pour la Mer Morte changent de voiture!'" Palestine had fallen victim to a grandiose version of the observer effect, for the explorers, archaeologists, pilgrims and surveyors had changed the place in observing it. A network of consulates, dragomans, package tours and international postal concessions had grown up to meet their needs. Ottoman pashas had been bullied into hunting down bandits, marshes had been drained and European colonists (still few in number) had introduced new techniques of viticulture and grain cultivation. The locals who believed that archaeology was a form of necromancy and that the Europeans had come among them to steal buried treasure or to poison their wells were mistaken, but they did not err in believing that the coming of these "disinterested" travellers boded no good for the future of an Arab Palestine. The surveys of the Palestine Exploration Fund proved useful to Allenby's invading forces in 1917-18; consulates and capitulations prepared the way for a British mandate, and the small-scale settlement of the Persian Jews as well as the activities of the London Society for the Conversion

of the Jews perhaps had a role in concentrating the attention of European Jews on the land of their ancestors.

Naomi Shepherd's study of the phenomenon begins with an account of Volney's travels in 1783-5 and Bonaparte's disastrous incursion into Palestine in 1799, but the book concentrates on the growing numbers of Westerners who visited or settled there in the nineteenth century. *The Zealous Intruders* tapers off in the later 1880s, avoiding discussion of the accelerated change brought about by, among other things, the first *Aliyah*, or large-scale migration of Jews from Eastern Europe, in 1882; and the intensification of German interest in Palestine, crowned by the triumphal entry of Kaiser Wilhelm II into Jerusalem in 1898. Shepherd includes the lands across the Jordan as part of Palestine. This was the nineteenth-century usage; the scholars who surveyed the cities of Decapolis in Transjordan reckoned them to be in Palestine.

Shepherd casts her net widely to cover scholars, engineers, agronomists, tourists and religious eccentrics, but since her subject is so large, *The Zealous Intruders* is really a series of linked essays, rather than a comprehensive survey. Among writers, Chateaubriand and Thackeray are in the book, but not Lamartine or Melville. Robert Curzon's horrifying report of the Holy Fire riots in the Holy Sepulchre in

1834 is briefly alluded to, but not the pathetic story of the deaths from plague of the monks of Jerusalem given in Kinglake's *Eothen*. De Sauley, the numismatist, and Clermont-Ganneau appear, but the manuscript hunts of Curzon and Lobegott Tischendorf have been left out. Poor Professor Palmer, "juggler, mesmerist, mind reader and raconteur, as well as a distinguished Arabist", features as a vainglorious if tragic clown. Sent by the British on a mission to win over the bedouin against the Egyptians, he was murdered by tribesmen in the Sinai Desert in 1882; the best evidence of his fate was "the truss of a very small man" found at the bottom of a ravine in the vicinity of some mangled corpses. This is diverting perhaps, but there is no reference at all to the very important surveying work Palmer had done from 1867 onwards in Palestine and Sinai for the Palestine Exploration Fund.

In general, Shepherd aims to entertain. She tells lots of good tales. The rivalries of the European consuls in Jerusalem and of their oriental dragomans and clients reminded me of nothing so much as the preposterous feuds pursued by Mapp and Lucia in Little Tilling. She has a sharp eye for scandals - for example, the clash between James Silk Buckingham and Joseph Banks over who discovered Gerasa, argued out in the lawcourts in England. Then there were the ancient Moabite pots whose

exposure as forgeries by Clermont-Ganneau was an embarrassment for the consuls in Jerusalem. The unedifying ends of religious colonies established by millenarian cranks are also part of *The Zealous Intruders* story.

Two final caveats. English, French, German and American visitors exercised an important influence on the future of Palestine, but they were greatly outnumbered by the tens of thousands of Russian pilgrims who visited the Holy Land every year, and Russia, through its protection of the Orthodox community in the Ottoman Empire and through its physical presence in Jerusalem (the Russian Cathedral compound was built in the 1860s), played an equally important part. Further, it is true that economic and social progress in the region owed much to figures like Consul James Finn, Sir Moses Montefiore and the German Templar colonists, but broader changes had their source in the East itself. Although Arab tribesmen continued to press into Palestine, it became easier to control the bedouin and to settle them, and peasants moved down from their hillside villages to recolonize the plains. Ottoman reforms and initiatives changed the face of the land, and it is one of the curiosities of history that, notwithstanding zealous European meddlers, Ottoman control over Palestine was stronger on the eve of the First World War than it had ever been before.

## Not much to write home about

Dervla Murphy

ERIC NEWBY  
*Round Ireland in Low Gear*  
308pp. Collins. £12.95.  
0002176394

Eric Newby writes affectionately of Southern Ireland, showing an amiable tolerance of the Republic's many foibles. Sadly, however, he has allowed himself to be persuaded by the media into imagining that Northern Ireland is best avoided by tourists. In his introduction he explains that "the North could wait. If things improved there, so much the better. If they got worse we would simply not go there. . . . We were not going [to Ireland], we hoped, to be shot at." No tourist has ever been shot at in Northern Ireland and had the Newbys peddled over the border and reported the truth - that one can cycle about for weeks without seeing any sign of "trouble" - this book might have done a lot to restore that region's maimed tourist industry.

Tourism in the Republic is said to bring in £850 million a year and much is spent on advertising Ireland's natural beauties, identified by a government White Paper as "the country's main tourist attraction". Yet the Irish Hotels Federation has recently pointed out that because of bungalow blight "the unique and unspoiled character of our countryside, and its ambience of open vistas and away-from-it-all solitude, no longer exists. . . . Denis Anderson, a distinguished Irish architect, has described the ghastly reality: 'No matter what road you go down, there are monstrosities here, there and everywhere. . . . Perhaps this "architectural acne" spreading over the face of Ireland" (Senator David Norris's phrase) partly explains why *Round Ireland in Low Gear* begins to go flat as the Newbys cycle through Co. Clare, and never recovers the light-heartedness of the first fifty or so pages. Mr



Saturday-night drinking in the Telstar pub in Derry's Creggan district - a detail from Marketa Luska's photograph in Ireland: A week in the life of a nation, edited by Red Saunders and Syd Shelton (288pp. Century Hutchinson. £19.95. 0712695184).

Newby recalls: "The road was the site of intensive ribbon development. . . . These bungalows were alien in the Irish countryside." An astonishingly restrained comment - but it is hard to believe that, as someone who had not visited Ireland for twenty years, Newby remained unshocked by the failure of successive governments to curb this vandalizing of one of the most beautiful countries in the world.

Despite being an experienced traveller and cyclist, Newby made several classic beginner's mistakes. Having bought two ludicrously expensive "mountain bikes" (stunt machines invented in the United States), he loaded up with "a three-way spanner, a ten-in-one dumb-bell spanner, two brake spanners, a pair of cone spanners, a Shimano crank bolt spanner and freewheel remover, a 4" adjustable wrench, three Allen keys, a spoke key, a cable cutter, a pair of pointed pliers, a tyre pressure gauge" - and very much more besides. No one needs eighteen gears and such a nonsensical plethora of tools and spares for bicycling round Ireland - or indeed for bicycling round Europe, or even far beyond Europe. A common-or-garden touring bicycle, for which spares could be bought in any Irish town, would have better served the Newby purpose - as the author admits, with his usual disarming frankness, on the last page.

Perhaps because they were carrying so much unnecessary weight (not only surplus hardware but numerous large guidebooks), the Newbys rarely cycled more than thirty miles a day and often used buses, trains or taxis. Their decision to cycle was entirely sensible, yet one feels that their journey became a gimmick, though it started in a spirit of genuine enthusiasm. Newby refers to "a boring stretch of road along the south side of Sligo Bay". And "beyond Clonmel the road became even more boring". After a ride lasting eleven miles to Killeen, the eighty-one-mile pedal along

the Grand Canal, from Ringsend to the Shannon, is described as "not much of a journey to write home about, or even write about. . . ."

In December 1985 the Newbys travelled through Co. Clare, before returning home for Christmas. In January 1986 they "did" Rosslare to Tralee, in June Dublin to Galway, in October Galway to Sligo. This journeying in instalments - which might have been an advantage, providing seasonal contrasts - gives *Round Ireland in Low Gear* an unsatisfactory formlessness. These mini-excursions were largely uneventful and confined to tourist areas, so the author was forced to uphold his narrative with information available in many guidebooks as well as wedges of compressed history. Some of these are dangerously misleading, as when he explains that "By the terms of the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, the twenty-six counties of the Irish Free State were conceded dominion status and the remaining six were to form an integral part of the United Kingdom." Other factual errors, combined with a sometimes painful inattention to syntax, suggest that Newby lost interest in his book long before the end. In Ireland in December the sun does not rise "around seven-thirty". Co. Monaghan is not in Northern Ireland. Patrick Pearse was born in 1879, not 1849. Connacht is a province, not a county.

The admirable object of the Newbys' Irish exercise was to enjoy themselves while collecting material for a travel book - and in these pages the Eric-Wanda exchanges are, as ever, a delight. But by now Ireland is so lacking in obvious eccentricities or exoticisms that so writing from it enough material for a readable travel book requires more effort than Eric Newby expended. If it were not for the indefinable but potent Newby charm, which comes through even when this author is at his most bored and boring, *Round Ireland in Low Gear* would be a disaster.

## After the write-down

Laurence Whitehead

STEPHANY GRIFFITH-JONES and OSVALDO SUNKEL  
*Debt and Development Crises in Latin America: The end of an illusion*  
197pp. Oxford: Clarendon Press. £20.  
0192835469  
JOSEPH RAMOS  
*Neo-conservative Economics in the Southern Cone of Latin America, 1973-83*  
198pp. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. £19.65.  
0801830400

In 1934, in the depths of the Great Depression, the combined losses of all United States banks totalled \$600 million (the equivalent would be about 4 billion current dollars). In the second quarter of 1987, major US banks wrote down the value of their debts to Third World countries by more than \$17 billion, and largely because of these actions total bank profits are expected to fall below \$6 billion this year (compared with \$18 billion last year). Admittedly this time the US banking system remains in profit. In fact the stock market has greeted these write-downs with relief, marking up quotations on most bank shares to indicate its belief that by facing up to reality on Third World debt, these banks can now hope for a more profitable future. Similar developments can be observed in Britain, where major banks are currently announcing write-downs totalling almost \$5 billion (over £3 billion), of which about one-third will be charged to taxpayers in the form of reduced bank taxes.

Stephany Griffith-Jones and Osvaldo Sunkel write in anticipation of some such day of reckoning, expressing the fear that the stability of the international financial system could be jeopardized were it mishandled. Events so far suggest that we have escaped an immediate banking crisis, and that there may be more "muddling through" in a poorly regulated environment than the authors foresee. However, the situation remains extremely delicate. Even after the huge write-offs just announced, many banks are still carrying Third World debt on their books well above open market value. Moreover, if world trade were to contract again, or dollar interest rates to ratch-

et upwards, the willingness (or capacity) of many debtors to pay could suddenly evaporate, and even bigger debt provisions could become necessary.

*Debt and Development Crises in Latin America* is concerned with the problems facing the banks, but far more concerned with the long-term consequences of this situation for the heavily indebted countries. In the five years since the debt crisis erupted, Latin American countries have made a net transfer of resources to their creditors of over \$120 billion, despite which their total obligations have continued to grow. The prospect of an indefinite continuation of this situation goes far to explain the temporary halt of interest payments announced this February by the largest debtor, Brazil. That in turn precipitated the recent massive write-downs.

Following the initial debt crisis of 1982, a series of policies was adopted to promote "adjustment" of heavily indebted economies (mainly austerity measures that worked by curtailing imports and thus generating trade surpluses), and to postpone ("reschedule") debt service payments until these countries were able to restore their "credit-worthiness". The Western financial establishment then conducted what now looks like an orchestrated campaign of confidence-building, which lasted until about the middle of 1985. It was claimed that as the industrialized countries recovered from the recession of 1982 they would gradually pull most Third World debtors out of the deep economic decline that had been brought on by foreign-exchange starvation. However, this remedy would work best for those governments that "adjusted" most promptly; whereas, it was said, those countries that delayed or resisted necessary austerity measures would be the last to enjoy the fruits of recovery.

Griffith-Jones and Sunkel express well-grounded scepticism about this complacency, and subsequent events have fully confirmed their more sober analysis. Indeed, over the past couple of months, as the full significance of the debt write-offs becomes apparent, a strong current of Western financial opinion has emerged to argue that large-scale private voluntary bank lending to most of the Third World is unlikely to resume for many years to come, no matter what "adjustment" policies these governments adopt. Other forms of external finance will have to be found if economic

reactivation is not to be continually choked off by a scarcity of foreign exchange.

One particular value of *Debt and Development Crises* is that it contains a clear and comprehensive review of what these alternative sources might be, and how they would work. The authors' object is not to advocate one particular formula, but to lay out the range of possibilities, paying due attention to both their technical and their political implications, so that the reader can judge for himself the significance of whatever course is chosen. Since they wrote, such eclecticism has been elevated into a virtue by many in the banking establishment, who now advocate what is called the "menu" approach to each debt renegotiation.

But the authors dissent from current orthodoxy in several critical respects. They argue that it is only by threatening unilateral action that the debtors are likely to secure realistic co-operation from the creditors, although they are alert to the risks inherent in such brinksmanship. They also warn that even with such threats to reinforce their bargaining strength, Third World debtors may be unable to gain any significant concessions from the industrialized world - especially if growth fades in the developed world. (Certainly, the somewhat utopian vision of long-term development offered in the final chapter runs strongly counter to anything the creditors are likely to champion). Most importantly, the international co-operation the authors seem to favour requires much greater regulation, intervention and official supervision than is currently acceptable to mainstream financial opinion. In an interesting attempt to invoke authoritative support for their prescriptions, the authors seek to recuperate lost insights from Keynes's wartime blueprint for an alternative to the Bretton Woods system of international financial management. In practice their recommendations would require a worldwide ideological conversion, back from "neo-liberalism" to "international Keynesianism", supported by a degree of international co-ordination and political resolve that for the present seems unattainable - at least to this reviewer. Of course, if the present philosophy leads the world into another

1934, then perhaps a Damascus-road conversion might occur. But the write-downs of summer 1987 are not yet regarded that seriously by the Western financial establishment.

Observers of Latin America have recently taken to demonstrating that the region's current debt obligations impose a heavier burden on its economy than the reparations levied on Germany by the Treaty of Versailles. Between 1982 and 1985, for example, Latin America's net transfer of resources to her creditors came to 4.2 per cent of her GDP, or a quarter of export earnings, compared with the 2.5 per cent of GDP or 13 per cent of export earnings levied on Germany between 1925 and 1932. Brazil's unilateral action was accompanied by a proposal to limit debt service outflows to 2.5 per cent of GDP instead of 4 per cent. But region-wide averages conceal striking differences between countries, both with regard to the scale of the problem and in relation to the associated domestic policies.

One such observer, Joseph Ramos, has written a clear and forceful account of the neo-conservative policies adopted in the 1970s by three "southern cone" countries (Argentina, Chile and Uruguay), which now face the heaviest burdens of debt servicing in the continent. His book has three particular strengths: it shows through mastery of the economic theories that were being tested, thus obliging neo-conservatives to take the criticisms seriously; it gives equal weight to each of the three countries, thus emphasizing the significance of context and implementation and the limitations of a purely doctrinaire approach; and it devotes special attention to the workings of the financial sector, a decisive aspect given the abruptness of the liberalization policies and the justified volatility of expectations.

These strengths of the book come at a price, however. In order to carry conviction with neo-conservative theorists, Ramos concedes more to their ideological assumptions than is warranted, and steers away from serious discussion of non-economic considerations (such as the social and political characteristics of these right-wing dictatorships) that did so much to shape the course of economic events.

## All the way to the bank

Dennis O'Keeffe

VINCENT P. CAROSSO  
*The Morgans: Private international bankers 1854-1913*  
888pp. Harvard University Press. £51.95.  
0674387294

Junius Spencer Morgan and his son John Pierpont Morgan were the greatest American bankers and among the outstanding international financiers of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. This huge and impressive study by Vincent Carosso takes us through the history of the Morgans from 1854 to the death of Pierpont Morgan in Rome in 1913, employing both the voluminous material available from the public archives and published economic history, and previously unused materials from the Morgans' business and private papers.

Carosso brings out the international aspects of the Morgans' lives, in a book which never seeks to impose its own colour on a colourful story. Junius moved from America to London, as was surprisingly common among leading nineteenth-century American businessmen, in 1834, to join George Peabody and Co, another American merchant banking house. Under Junius (the company, renamed in 1864 J. S. Morgan and Co, was to become an international rival to giants like Rothschild's and Baring's. A true internationalist, Junius was to die, like his son, in Italy, in his case in moderate old age, in a road accident. But before assuming the leadership of his father's London company in 1890, Pierpont had gained a powerful position in American finance, especially with Drexel, Morgan and Co.

The Morgans' range of investments was broad, but it always was the financing of the

American railroad networks with which they will be most closely associated. From the 1860s the London House of Morgan was a major distributor of American railroad securities. The Morgans' contribution to other forms of economic modernization was also considerable - for example, to the increasingly widespread use of electricity and the spread of the telephone and the telegraph in the later years of the century.

International finance was more difficult than now: Though cable communication was effective it did not afford the sensitive contact of modern communications, and Carosso wryly notes the occasional wrangling over the cost of cabling between the Morgans and their associates. The Morgans did not, of course, confine themselves to investments in private undertakings in the successful parts of the world economy. They also dealt in government securities and in regions and industries which, however profitable, did not engender the kind of economic progress typical of North America or Western Europe. Carosso does not ask this still crucial question: why does overseas lending sometimes work and sometimes not, for example, often not in Latin America?

Carosso does not much intrude into the personal lives of the Morgans. He affords us just a few coyly agnostic remarks about Pierpont's alleged philandering, for example. He does bring out, however, the ambivalence with which many intellectuals have always regarded financiers. Socialistic writers like Upton Sinclair were keen on berating the Morgans and "progressive" lawyers like Louis D. Brandeis have always enjoyed representing them as conspirators against the public interest. Perhaps the truth is that such larger-than-life figures will always attract more than their share of envy and spite. Their achievements will endure.

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# But are things as we think they are?

J. Hillis Miller

PAUL RICOEUR  
Time and Narrative  
Translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and  
David Pellauer  
Volume 1  
274pp. University of Chicago Press. £21.25.  
0226713318  
Volume 2  
208pp. University of Chicago Press. £18.95.  
0226713334  
Temps et récit: Tome III  
427pp. Paris: Seuil. 125fr.  
2121809815

Within the somewhat chaotic but certainly lively and productive field of current critical theory, phenomenology or "hermeneutics" still has a place. It takes its place, that is, alongside feminist, reader-response, structuralist and semiotic, rhetorical or "deconstructionist", Marxist, Foucaultian, Lacanian, and "new historicist" theories, with all their proliferating versions and internal fissures. It makes the mind ache to think of it.

Within phenomenological theory the work of Paul Ricoeur plays an important role. Though he is by profession a philosopher, his books have been widely translated and have been influential outside philosophy: for example, *Histoire et vérité* (a book on the theory of history), *De l'interprétation* (a book on Freud), and *La Métaphore vive* (in which Ricoeur argues for a productive and positive function of figurative language). The big new trilogy on time and narrative adds itself to that list. It is a work addressed as much to historians and to literary critics as to philosophers.

In an influential essay of 1979, "The Resistance to Theory", Paul de Man argued that the resistance to theory is intrinsic to theory itself. The resistance to theory, he said, is in fact a disguise for the resistance to reading. The situation has changed quite a bit, even since 1979. Theory is so dominant everywhere now in teaching and writing in the humanities and social sciences that it would be better to speak of the universal triumph of theory rather than of any effective resistance to it. This is true in spite of the denunciations that continue to appear, for example in the mass media or within journals like *Representations* that are nothing if not theoretical whatever their protestations to the contrary. One way to define the current situation is to say that the claim that you are not being theoretical only makes you all the more theoretical, since the claim of the refusal of theory is itself a theoretical position.

What do I mean, exactly, by the "triumph of theory"? I mean what is obvious on all sides, not just the attention now paid to literary theory even in the mass media, but the immense proliferation of essays, books, dissertations, new series by publishers, new journals, courses, curricula, programmes, professorships, conferences, symposia, study groups, institutes, centres, and "focused research units", all devoted to critical theory. It is a gigantic paraphernalia of collective intellectual effort. In so far as the whole purpose of theory is to facilitate the "reading" of something or other, a poem, a novel, a work of philosophy, a film, some cultural phenomenon, some "text", as they say, the awestruck witness of all this effort may remember the famous television commercial and ask, "Where's the beef?" It sometimes seems to have been forgotten or not to have been noticed that the best of the begetters of all this, Paul de Man and Jacques Derrida, for example, among my own associates, have never written "pure theory" as such but have always drawn theoretical formulations from the work of reading, some text or other, Rousseau's *Julie*, say, for de Man; or poems and essays by Paul Celan in a recent book by Derrida, *Schibboleth*.

The distinction between theory and practice in fact breaks down in the most vital and effective recent works of "theory". "Practice" also here means political practice, the leverage of the work of theory on the institutional and political structures within which the theory is carried on. This includes, for example, deconstruction, despite widespread assumptions to the contrary. Derrida has tirelessly repeated

his assertion that deconstruction is

at the very least, a way of taking a position, in its work of analysis, concerning the political and institutional structures that make possible and govern our practices, our competencies, our performances. Precisely because it is never concerned only with significant content, deconstruction should not be separable from this politico-institutional problematic and should seek a new investigation of responsibility, an investigation which questions the codes inherited from ethics and politics.

What is true of deconstruction is also obviously true of other modes of theory, feminist, for example, or "new historicist". It is also true, though perhaps in a more problematic and less obvious way, for the mode of theory represented by Ricoeur.

Phenomenological criticism or "hermeneutics" plays a conspicuously reactionary role within current critical theory and practice. By "reactionary" I mean that hermeneutics wants to return to older, more conservative, more comfortably conventional modes of interpreting. This would imply a strong resistance to that restructuring of disciplinary alignments and that new taking-on of social and political responsibility which the "triumph of theory" is bringing about. But I also mean by "reactionary" that hermeneutics is often explicitly a reaction against various recent language-oriented theories in the name of pre-linguistic "experience" or "life". Hermeneutic theories of interpretation in one way or another bypass the interference of the rhetorical dimension of language in its grammatical and logical functioning. They do this by assuming the existence of stable monological texts of determinable meanings, meanings controlled in each case by the intentions of the author and by the text's reference to a pre-linguistic "real world out there".

The appeal of phenomenological criticism is, however, curiously double. It attracts those who like lots of pompous jargon and intricate schematizing. This is perhaps because such complexity makes them feel that something serious and authoritative is going on, something "scientific". Phenomenology also appeals, however, to those who want to be reassured, to those who want something positive as an antidote to all the doubting and putting-in-question in much current critical theory. Phenomenology tends to presuppose that everything is really going to turn out all right and that everything is pretty much as we think it is in this best of all possible worlds.

Ricoeur's ponderous trilogy, *Time and Narrative*, will appeal on both those grounds. It moves with mind-numbing slowness and solemnity over three big volumes discussing a great many theories of narrative temporality from St Augustine to Hayden White — historians, literary theorists, philosophers of time, linguists, semioticians, sociologists, anthropologists. The bibliography of works cited and discussed covers seventeen pages. Ricoeur works by way of much repetition, recapitulation and anticipation. His basic points are made over and over, in tedious iteration. There are many sentences like the following, a fair example of the texture of his style:

Rule-governed deformation constitutes the axis around which the various changes of paradigm through application are arranged. It is this variety of applications that confers a history on the productive imagination and that, in counterpart to self-intentionation, makes a narrative tradition possible. This is the final enrichment by which the relationship of narrative in time is augmented at the level of mimesis.

[The distinctions between Ricoeur's three levels of mimesis will become clear in a moment.]

These sentences are also a good example of another curious but characteristic feature of Ricoeur's work, as of phenomenological hermeneutics generally. For all his talk about time, Ricoeur's own language is stubbornly dominated by spatial metaphors; metaphors of strata, sediments, axes, levels, horizons; and so on. Within a complex mental space, the terms of his analysis are flat or one-dimensional counters displayed and redeployed like points, lines, squares and triangles in a geometrical diagram. Ricoeur's aim is, to bring together in one big study and dominate with his terminology what philosophers have said about time, what historians have said about narrative and time, and what literary theorists have said. He wants to get everything relevant in all its intricacy, into one big hermeneutical

space and offer judicious criticism along the way.

But all this complexity is the vehicle for a rather simple set of presuppositions of Ricoeur's own about time and narrative. It is here also that his work will appeal to those who want to be reassured. His study is an example of the affirmative and positive hermeneutics that Ricoeur, in a well-known polemical distinction, opposed to the "hermeneutics of suspicion" in Freudian and other modern theories of interpretation. His paradigm is what might be called a "soft" phenomenology. I mean by "soft" that it is derived, also somewhat sentimentalized and simplified, from the rigours and complexities of Husserl, Heidegger, and others of the founding fathers of phenomenology.

Ricoeur's basic model for narrative temporality is presented in a single sentence early in the second volume: "We are following therefore the destiny of a prefigured time that becomes a refuged time through the mediation of a configured time" (italics in the original). Just what does this mean?

Narrative, for Ricoeur, originates in and returns to the warm world of lived experience. This is a solid foundation of "within-time-ness". In it we have a "preunderstanding" of ourselves and of our temporal destiny. We have a grasp of "prefigured" time, of other people, of society, and of history. This preunderstanding is mimesis. In this *Lebenswelt* all the problems of time are always already solved or at any rate encompassed. If they were not already encompassed they could never be solved by thinking or by narrating. The "aporia" of time in the thought of Aristotle, St Augustine, and the rest are products of abstraction from the all-togetherness and hanging-together of lived experience. For Ricoeur the impassable mind confronts as soon as it tries to think about time are, if not resolved, at any rate transformed, as soon as they are turned into narration. Narration, or "mimesis", is a fundamental part of everyday "lived experience". As Ricoeur puts it near the end of the third volume, "narrative is the guardian of time", and "temporality cannot be expressed in the direct discourse of a phenomenology, but requires the mediation of the indirect discourse of narration".

This notion of "lived experience" is a marvellous resource for a theorist. Whenever you get stuck you can appeal back to it as a solid ground for whatever you want to claim is the case. Ricoeur's commitment to the primacy of "lived experience" also means that he is playing a no-lose game from the beginning. He has, for example, bypassed all the problems that arise from the fundamentally constitutive function of language or of signs generally in human life. The notion of lived experience is also wonderfully reassuring in the way it says things are what we think they are or feel they are. Though Ricoeur concedes the role of "semantics" and "symbolic systems" in the *Lebenswelt* of which we have a "preunderstanding" shared with all others, his view of language remains a more or less unambiguous copy theory. Language, for him, mirrors, represents or "expresses" the lived world. He presupposes a sequence "starting", as he says, "from our experience of being in the world and in time, and proceeding from this ontological condition towards its expression in language".

For Ricoeur, narrative proper, whether the historian's narration of events that "really happened" or the novelist's invention of fictive stories, rises up from the ground of prefigured time as a new "configuration" of time. This is mimesis. Ricoeur's account of narrative reconfiguration of temporality is complex enough, in its elaborate distinctions between fictive and historical narrative. Historical narrative, for example, is, according to him, the "reinscription" of phenomenological time on the inalterable ground of "cosmological time", the time of dates and facts. Fictive time, on the other hand, is the exploration of the "aporia" of phenomenological time in a realm free from the obligation to match up to cosmological time and to other configurations of phenomenological time, "like geographical maps set edge to edge" (another spatial metaphor here). Fictive time is an especially good place to explore the possible relations of time and eternity. This iterated presupposition, by the way, commits Ricoeur to a more or

less straightforwardly religious or metaphysical reading of the novels by Woolf, Mann and Proust that are his primary examples of fictional narratives. It also underlies the concluding argument, at the end of the third volume, that narrative, in spite of its role as the "guardian of time", ultimately encounters its own limits in the "irrepresentability" and "inscrutability" of time, especially time in its relation to eternity.

In spite of all this complexity Ricoeur's thinking here is governed by rather simple and traditional notions of the way plot or "employment" in any kind of narrative confers wholeness and shapeliness, makes sense and order, produces what Ricoeur calls, over and over, "discordant concordance" or "a synthesis of the heterogeneous".

His notion of "reconfiguration" is reassuring in a number of ways. It allows us to go on believing that a good story is a rounded whole that makes sense of the world and presupposes that the world makes sense. It assumes that all narratives are referential. Narratives both historical and fictional are solidly grounded in the lived world from which they rose up, that empowers them, and to which they always refer. This assumption parallels the way Ricoeur's *The Rule of Metaphor* subjects figurative language to the ultimate function of reference to the "real world". His quarrel with structural narratologists, argued at length in *Time and Narrative*, turns on this claim of a presupposed referentiality (as opposed to any view of narrative as self-contained or self-referential).

Narrative, fictive or historical, finally turns back on the realm of lived experience and "refigures" time. We live in the real world according to the ordering patterns of fictional or historical narratives. Narrative in the end, then, returns in a productive, positive and affirmative way to make an essential contribution to the *Lebenswelt*. This is mimesis. Ricoeur's account of this ultimate stage too is immensely reassuring in the way it gives a positive social function to storytelling. He presupposes that the realm of the "life-world" is enriched but not substantially altered or challenged by the "reconfigurations" of historical or fictional narrative.

To put as bluntly as possible what is wrong with this: all Ricoeur's basic presuppositions are mistaken. There is no such thing as an "experience of being in the world and in time" prior to language. All our "experience" is permeated through and through by language. The aporias of temporality are a displaced name for a linguistic predicament that exists as much in narrative as in any other mode of language. There is no such thing as a cosmological time that exists passively out there waiting to be dated and described, ready to function as a yardstick against which historical and fictional narratives can be measured. Cosmological time arises through the act of dating, and dating is a contradictory posing or marking by language that simultaneously presupposes the singularity of a date and its repeatability. There is no such thing as a concordance of the discordant in narrative. Any narrative, of any time or place, like any other text, is marked by an intrinsic heterogeneity. This heterogeneity may be variously defined: as the interference of rhetoric (in the sense of the figurative dimension of language) in the functioning of grammar and logic, or as the interference, one with another, of the performative and referential functions of language. In any case this heterogeneity means that there is no such thing as a return of narrative as a "reconfiguration" of "lived time" that is not fundamentally inaugural, disruptive.

There is of course not time nor is (this) the place to argue these points in detail. To make them even so schematically, however, will indicate the major omission from Ricoeur's account of the various theories of narrative he needs to contest in order to make way for his own. His major target among literary narratologists, as I have said, is structuralism. Practically nothing is said anywhere about deconstructive narrative theory. Paul de Man is nowhere mentioned, and there are only a couple of passing and inconsequential references to Derrida. This is all the more curious when one realizes that Ricoeur has spent much time in the United States and, in fact, wrote much of his book there. Yet *Time and*

*Narrative* is written in abstraction from what is seen in the United States as the major challenge to hermeneutics. By writing as though structuralism were still the major alternative narrative theory, by taking no account, for example, of what de Man says about Rousseau and Proust in *Allegories of Reading* or of what Derrida has written about Blanchot, or of the brilliant work on narrative of younger associates of de Man and Derrida like Andrzej Warminski, Cynthia Chase, Carol Jacobs, Shoshana Felman and Barbara Johnson, to name just a few, Ricoeur has detached his work from the real action these days in narrative theory.

Deconstruction is itself heterogeneous. It has different forms wherever and in whatever discipline it takes root, but it has by now been widely disseminated, if I may use that word, not only in the United States but around the world. It is vital now not just in departments of literature but in departments of philosophy and religious studies, even in the fields of law and architecture. But whether taken

altogether in its heterogeneity or, more narrowly, just in the work of Derrida and de Man, deconstruction is the most cogent challenge to the presuppositions that Ricoeur goes on blithely reaffirming as if they had only been put in question by a structural narratology no longer dominant or even strongly compelling.

The real challenge to Ricoeur posed by deconstruction is not "theoretical" at all, or not merely theoretical. It is the challenge of one mode of reading (what I should call "real reading") against another (what I should call not really reading at all, but mere thematic summary or plot summary). Ricoeur is certainly a splendid example of the way theory can be a resistance to reading. The readings that he provides throughout his book of the theorists, or of philosophers like Kant, Husserl, or Heidegger, or of novels "about time", Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway*, Mann's *Magic Mountain*, and Proust's *A la Recherche du temps perdu*, are uniformly flat and literalist. Ricoeur has little gift for the understanding of figurative language, little gift for the understanding of irony,

little gift for that one thing needful for good reading: recognition of small significant details in a text whether of theory, philosophy or fiction, that go against its apparent thematic assertions. In fact there is scarcely any "reading" at all anywhere in these three volumes if one means by reading a confrontation of the linguistic complexities of the texts discussed.

A case in point would be Ricoeur's extremely reductive account of one of his major examples from fiction, *Mrs Dalloway*. In his discussion, the admirably complex texture of temporality in *Mrs Dalloway*, present in the handling of pronouns, tenses and figures of speech, is reduced to a retelling of the plot, a bland formulation of the opposition between Clarissa and Septimus, a summary of what some of the characters say about time, and a linear following through of the various moments in the novel when Big Ben strikes the hour. But the same thing is true of Ricoeur's readings of Heidegger, as opposed to those of Derrida, or of his reading of Proust's great novel as opposed to those by de Man.

## Intentions towards language

Michael Sprinker

PETERSZONDI  
On Textual Understanding and Other Essays  
Translated by Harvey Mendelsohn  
224pp. Manchester University Press.  
Paperback, £8.95.  
0719014638  
Theory of the Modern Drama  
Edited and translated by Michael Hays  
128pp. Oxford: Blackwell. £19. (Paperback, £6.95).  
07456038820.

Only now are Peter Szondi's writings receiving serious attention beyond France and Germany, where he has been read continuously and attentively since the 1960s. The translations and excellent commentaries provided in the two volumes under review will make it possible for Anglophone readers to discern the broad outlines of Szondi's project and method, and will, one hopes, prepare the ground for further translations and more extensive critical attention in Britain and North America.

But another set of obstacles, both historical and cultural, stands in the way of any ready assessment of Szondi's oeuvre, obstacles which his own insistence on the historical nature of understanding compels us to face up to. Scholars and critics in the English-speaking world are now quite distant from the conjuncture of the post-war German university system and its crisis during the 1960s which powerfully informed Szondi's writing and teaching. Moreover, the corpus on which he primarily focused — the German Romantics, classical German aesthetics, the hermeneutic tradition descending from Schleiermacher, the poetry of Celan — remains largely outside the ken of non-Germanists. Szondi speaks out of an intimacy with these texts that only those who share his passion for the originals will be able to appreciate in detail. And it is in detail that his interpretative and theoretical originality resides.

Nothing startling or unfamiliar emerges from Szondi's more lapidary formulations about method. The programmatic essays, "On Textual Understanding" (not the most felicitous translation of the German original, "Über philologische Erkenntnis") and "Schleiermacher's Hermeneutics Today", while they introduce the spirit of his critical procedure, appear little more than small buds of a late-blooming Hegelianism. Similarly, *Theory of the Modern Drama* remains firmly within the boundaries established by Szondi's methodological masters: Adorno (*Philosophy of Modern Music*), Lukács (*Theory of the Novel*), and most importantly, Hegel (*The Aesthetics*). To the extent that he remains constrained by the schematism of Hegel's dubious historical narrative, Szondi violates his own most basic principle: "For texts present themselves as individuals, not as specimens. We must try to interpret them at first in accord with the concrete process whose results they are, and not in accord with an abstract rule which invalidates the individuality of the text."

In the decisive years from 1800 until his collapse, Hölderlin used the word *poetry* (*Poetik*) four times in his poetry. On three occasions it designates the sun's rays or lightning, and in a variant reading of *The Song of Life* (*Lebenslied*) it even replaces the word "lightning" (*Blitz*), which was written down previously. The fourth time it appears, however, is when the poet mentions the "other arrow" (*von andern Pfeile*). This phrase is later corrected to read "of a self-inflicted wound" (*von selbstgeschlagener Wunde*). The change sacrifices the connection with the thunderstorm in order to make clearer what is meant by this term "other". The "other arrow" comes not from the god but from man himself; it is man who has inflicted this wound on himself. (Hölderlin, *Selected Works*, trans. Michael Hays, 1980, pp. 100-101.)

The apparently trivial question of whether or not to include the fragments of Hölderlin's continuation in the text of the poem turns out to be a crux for interpreting his poetic project, and thus the key to understanding the world of the later poetry. The "failure" of *As on a holiday* . . . prepared the way for the achievement of what was to follow:

Only after the failure, a failure that simultaneously yielded understanding and purification, could Hölderlin begin his real hymnic poetry, his real "late work". This poetry is no less personal than the odes and elegies, but the ego whose voice it carries no longer recognizes any arrow other than the god's.

A comparable exegetical tenacity motivates the final essay included in *On Textual Understanding*, on "The Poetry of Constancy": Paul Celan's translation of Shakespeare's Sonnet 105. Szondi shows authoritatively how Celan's complete disregard for the letter of Shakespeare's text enables him none the less to embody the latter's thematic intent:

Constancy, the theme of Shakespeare's sonnet, becomes for Celan the medium in which his verse dwells and which impedes the flow of his verse. Imposing constancy upon it, Constancy becomes the constituent element of his verse, in contrast to Shakespeare's original, in which constancy is sung about and described by means of a variety of expressions. Celan's intention toward language, in his version of Shakespeare's sonnet 105, is a realization of constancy in verse.

The scope of this insight is not confined to the particular occasion of its discovery. Celan's "intention toward language" can become the point of departure for more general observations on the character of modern poetry since Mallarmé — observations that Szondi makes only tentatively in the present essay. The lesson Szondi enforces here is of the ultimate dependence of literary historical generalization on the close interpretation of individual texts.

That such an interpretative enterprise need not remain a comparatively sterile formal exercise, Szondi's example amply demonstrates. His finest essays confirm Paul de Man's insistence that "what we usually call literary history has little or nothing to do with literature and what we call literary interpretation — provided only it is good interpretation — is in fact literary history".

Michel Foucault's study of the turn-of-the-century experimental playwright, poet and novelist, Raymond Roussel, *Death and the Labyrinth: The world of Raymond Roussel*, has now been published by The Athlone Press (186pp. £9.95, 0 485 113366 8), in an English translation by Charles Ruas. First printed in 1963, and reviewed in the TLS of July 12 of that year, this study is Foucault's only book to deal with literature. This new edition includes an introductory essay on Roussel by John Ashbery, written in 1961 "at a time when very few people [in France] or elsewhere took Roussel seriously as a writer", and intended to introduce him to English-speaking readers. An interview with Foucault by Ruas is also included.

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# Hiding the harm away

Michael Wood

JOHN UPDIKE  
Trust Me  
249pp. Deutsch. £9.95.  
0233981319

John Updike's critical reputation seems assured and rising. The highbrow youngster turned into the middlebrow success, and continuing success has made him a kind of master, the historian of shabby, shallow consciences. The magisterial effect is enhanced by evidence of his wide reading and intelligence, in his critical essays, for example, or the theological high jinks in *Roger's Version*. Updike's mind is larger than his fictional world. But then how small is this world, and does smallness matter?

It is a world full of distress and accident, but also full of heedlessness, of people throwing away affections and loyalties and not knowing what they have done. His characters are often likeable, kindly, well-intentioned, never wicked, but they are so deeply, so righteously absorbed in themselves that they seem to be slightly spoiled children, however old they are. Misreading their American heritage, they are convinced that happiness, and not just the pursuit of it, is their inescapable due, and their error leaves damage all over the place. Updike's reporting on this world is delicate and precise, his sympathies are agile and discreet. But I keep wondering whether such a world is really a full-time job for a writer of Updike's talents, whether it should take up so much of his care and tenderness. His new collection of very good stories goes some way to answering this question, although various fringes of doubt remain.

Updike's characters are lawyers, teachers, insurance agents, tax consultants, stockbrokers. The men, that is. The women usually make beautiful homes and look after their several children. We know all about the clothes they wear and the cars they drive. They all keep pretty fit, play tennis and golf, go skiing; although they tend to drink a lot, and sometimes fall apart. They live in Hartford or Boston or the suburbs of Connecticut or Massachusetts or New York State. They read a little, and spend a lot of time in each others' houses. Men and women are remorselessly unfaithful to their spouses, as if infidelity were an unavoidable itch, or as if they lived in a soap opera they couldn't switch off. They don't make a fuss about this, though, and they keep their sexual romps within their circles of friends, as if they were playing an anxious, orderly game within the family. The excitement of a woman about to embark on an affair is described as "iridescent... a rainbow", and the rainbow remains, although she knows when she looks back that "there was much in the aftermath to regret, and a harm that would never cease". But she is rare in these stories because she sees the harm; rather still because she sees it won't cease. Children are dimly present in this world - they grow up, drop out, die of overdoses - but mainly as worries on the edges of adult confusion, part of the litter left when marriages break. Occasionally, as in the wonderful story "The Lovely Troubled Daughters of Our Old Crowd", they are objects of real concern, young spinsters scared away from marriage by the mess their parents have made, and in another story, "Slippage", a father thinks of his daughters as if each were "a pea suspended in the center of an empty cube, waiting to be found, a tiny, hard, slightly shrivelled core of disappointment... The picture had the sadness of a Magritte. The marriages mostly do break, not because of the easy infidelities, but because people change, and the pursuit of happiness is a hard task-master.

The worries of this world are well focused in the title story, which sparsely presents images of requests for trust: a father inviting his son to jump into a swimming pool, where he will catch him; a father offering to fix his daughter's teeth-brace; a man taking his new girlfriend down a difficult ski slope; a pilot calming passengers as he turns his plane round for an engine check; the very wings of the plane in their unlikely lift over the sea: "He had often felt, through one of these scratched oval windows, something falsely reassuring in the elaborate order of the rivets pinning the aluminium sides

together. Trust me, the metallic code spelled out. . . . Of course the father doesn't catch the boy; the other father hurts the girl; the slope was far too difficult; planes have been known to crash. We need to trust; we need to be trusted. But we can't give guarantees, and trust is especially hard, Updike seems to be saying, when betrayal is tempting and easy and the norm. Some sort of faith would help here, but faith itself, as in the painful story "Made in Heaven", can become a battleground: a man attracted to religion because of his wife's austere and poised belief discovers that he has driven her away from it, taken it over. "You moved right in. It didn't seem necessary, for the two of us to keep it up." She means she couldn't keep it up, he left her no space.

Updike's writing is often brilliantly exact. "There was no choir, and each shift of weight on a pew rang out like a cough"; "The bushes were bowed and splayed [beneath the snow] like bridesmaids overwhelmed by flowers"; "She had attended correct second-best schools. . . . He is particularly good at catching historical moods, the days before hippies turned into yuppies, for example, or the days before that, when "Eisenhower had settled for a draw in Korea and McCarthy had self-destructed like a fairy-tale goblin. . . . He is adept at seeing the unlikely places where happiness may lurk, as in knowing that you are really ill, in hospital for a reason, an inhabitant of "a circle of acknowledged ruin"; as in shaking off

## Links to bruised hearts

David Pryce-Jones

CHINUA ACHIBE  
*Anthills of the Savannah*  
233pp. Heinemann. £10.95.  
0434006011

A West African state closely resembling Nigeria is the setting in *Anthills of the Savannah* for an attack on one-man rule, and the corrupt political and social attitudes thereby engendered. A man with a walk-on part, evidently representing popular wisdom, sums up the novel's whole thrust in the sentence, "To be big man no hard but to be poor man be no small thing."

The big man, His Excellency, once seemed a hope for the future. In his youth at Lord Lugard College, he formed a triumvirate with Christopher Oriko and Ikem Osodi, now Commissioner for Information and editor of the *National Gazette* respectively. In power, he has set himself apart, an unmitigated bully and boaster. His Director of Security has the habit of punching a staple on his victims' hands to obtain confessions. Soldiers and policemen in the novel are greatly to be feared.

The scenes which build up to the confrontation between the despot and his two former friends are often vivid. Ikem attends a public execution, conducted as though it were a spectator sport, and registers dismay in print. He is the kind of man who out of pride refuses to allow a taxi to edge ahead in a traffic jam. Belonging to a tribe in the north which withheld its vote when His Excellency demanded life presidency, he is vulnerable. The parting of the ways is easily made to support a charge of conspiracy.

Certain character sketches also come alive. A visiting American journalist is an amusing specimen of the ignorant know-all; Beatrice, Christopher's blue-stockinged girl-friend, is summoned to a party at His Excellency's country retreat, where she finds herself unsure if he is intending to seduce or to murder her.

To borrow words which Ikem applies to himself, Achebe cannot resist "putting the nation on its head to self-redemption". Self-redemption here means agreeing with Achebe's own preconceptions. Taking the stance of a heroic liberal, he may well be right. To point the narrative in the desired political direction, however, he indulges in editorializing which strains credibility. "It is the failure of our rulers", he throws out characteristically, "to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country, with the bruised heart that throbs painfully at the core of the nation's being." In this spirit, the poor and simple, Nkechi, a shop-girl carrying them

the mental image of the husband who used to mean more to you than the wife you stole from him. The story "Getting into the Set" has the sharp bitterness of one of Fitzgerald's insights into the careless rich. A couple in their early thirties finally make it into the company they admire in their little New England town, a group with "a ramshackle and reckless yet well-heeled air". The jolly gang invades the couple's historical treasure of a house, scraping the beautiful floorboards, staining the tables and burning the shelves, dropping dip and crisps into the old blue Tabriz carpet. They mean no harm, they are just being their mildly rowdy selves. We wince at the lovingly detailed destruction, and are quite unprepared for the story's unsettling conclusion, for the measure of the wife's social appetite: "She turned, to face the wrecked room with hot eyes. The tears could come now, now that they were tears of happiness."

It is a small world, but its smallness doesn't matter. What does matter, it seems to me, what limits Updike, in his stories and novels, is his unwillingness to let his characters look, except in tiny glimpses, at the harm in their world and their part in causing it. Or they look, like Rabbit Angstrom, at the harm they haven't caused as a way of hiding from the harm they have caused. This is the way such people are, we might say, and there are such people: Updike has his historical brief. This is a decent answer, but it confirms rather than alters the limits of the writing. Why is the fineness of Updike's mind barred from the country of his characters? We get a clue in "Leaf Season", perhaps the most ambitious story in this collection, a portrait of a generation at play. A cluster of married friends and their children and dogs and cats spend a weekend in Vermont, inventing games, gossiping, chopping logs, getting tight, getting older, remembering past intragroup infidelities, starting others. The story ends with one of the women showing some of the children the colours and the behaviour of the changing leaves. They fall through the autumn, they cover the ground, but no one sees them fall. "Nobody sees it happen, but it does", the woman says. The allegory is a little too pointed, too tidy: lives also come unstuck imperceptibly. But not only too pointed. It is facile and sentimental. It suggests that human lives alter like a season, that we float like leaves into new arrangements. Maybe some of us do, but Updike's characters snatch and conspire and race for what they take to be the world's emotional prizes. Their helplessness is just their favourite story about themselves, and yet Updike finally seems to endorse it, or at least does nothing to take it from them. He is asking us not to like his characters but to forgive them. I'd do that gladly, if I could see the charges. But the charges are what Updike, in his tenderness, has decided to bury. His mind stays out of his fictional territory because of what it might find there.

child, speak pidgin as though it were the medium fitted for the natural truth spoken by the deprived. With the good so good, and the bad so bad, a simple morality tale emerges. On the run, both Ikem and Christopher are shot and killed, at the very moment when His Excellency himself falls victim to other plotters.

Ikem's rupture with His Excellency is marked by a long speech to students in the university about the limitations of their concept of violent revolution, a speech as impeccable as it is irrelevant to the action. For no apparent reason, first-person interior monologues are given to Ikem and Christopher, but not to His Excellency, and this device, too, serves to load the message. His Excellency's moral degradation is a matter of say-so, not explained as the custom of the country, psychological compulsion, mistaken idealism or whatever. Perhaps it is hard, too hard, to be

## Cash of titans

Roz Kaveney

MAX APPLE  
*The Propheteers*  
306pp. Faber. £9.95.  
0571148786

They meet, by chance, fate or authorial whim, and inevitably they clash: gods and titans, sheriffs in white hats and gunslingers in black hats, the Incredible Hulk and Ego the Living Planet. It is not over rational things that they clash; it is in their natures, forever opposed, that they should do so. Much of Max Apple's *The Propheteers* is concerned with demystifying the very rich by showing them as compulsive neurotics; much partakes of myth or comic book, for example the way Apple sets up his central characters, the primordial entrepreneurs of the American mid-century, and sets them in motion towards each other and towards an encounter that we expect to be frightening. That it is not is partly a serious calculation on his part - debunking the rich, he cannot afford them any sort of epic grandeur; but partly also a failure of imagination, a falling in with that rule which says that every American historical novel is liable to end with a bathtub riot.

There converge in the Florida of the mid-1960s the brothers Disney, anxious to set up Disneyworld and increase their profits; Margaret Post, of breakfast cereal and frozen food fame, equally anxious to keep her neighbourhood free of the millions of tourists that Disneyworld will bring in; and Howard Johnson,

the big man. What happened at Lord Lugard College, or afterwards, that His Excellency adopted one set of values, and his two friends quite another, for which they were prepared to lay down their lives?

Present in the novel is a potentially fascinating tension between things African and things European. A creation myth entitled "Idindil" and a rhapsodic "Hymn to the Sun", which might have come from quite another book, have been incorporated; and elsewhere a tribal elder delivers a lengthy statement of folk-wisdom. At the novel's close, reconciliation is suggested through a naming ceremony for Elewa's new-born child, at which the bereft women and their friends intone consoling African chants. This is Hollywood's prescription for inner links to bruised hearts, and not likely to save the liberal Ikems of this unfortunate world, nor to trouble His Excellency.

of the motels and the ice cream, anxious to make a profit from travellers, but concerned too with providing quality and distressed by the low standards of Disney catering. Much of the novel - too much - concerns itself with their pasts and the pasts of the empires they have created and maintained. We have Johnson and his entourage travelling endlessly around the United States in a Cadillac, finding ideal sites for motels by a sort of divination and testing ice cream flavours as they go. We have Margaret trying to live up to her crusading vegetarian father, and engaged in unlikely dealings with Stalin and Dalí. We have Walt brooding on the natural world and the death it contains everywhere, and his brother Will perpetually turning his morbidity to sentimentality (and profit). We have their hangers-on, and enemies - a mad baseball-park proprietor who believes the Disneys responsible for the fire that destroyed his career as an animator. We have travels and tribulations and traumas; and in the end the prodigality of invention that for most of the book is charming becomes suffocating. Apple blends his satire on the overweening power of the rich with a gentle nostalgia for the days when they were human enough to be slightly mad, before the faceless men took over the corporations; and finally all this turns to cloying whimsy.

On the way, though, there are many felicities, and many scenes at once picturesque and drollly amusing. Apple is an inventor, and his admiration for his three central characters derives from the extent to which they have created private worlds by an exercise of will; but his own novel fails to follow these steely wills through to a convincing conclusion.

# Scenes from writing life

P. N. Furbank

ANDREW McNEILLIE (Editor)  
*The Essays of Virginia Woolf*  
Volume Two: 1912-1918  
381pp. Hogarth. £25.  
070206675

Almost all of the items in this second volume of the admirable McNeillie edition of Virginia Woolf's essays and reviews were written for the TLS. This meant, in the days of Bruce Richmond's editorship, that they would be unsigned and that Woolf would present herself as "we", with minor excursions into "he" (but never "she") and would be terribly poised and well bred and, if rude, rude in the most mannerly possible way. As it happened, the conventions suited her down to the ground and were the ideal stimulus to her genius. She was not by nature kind, but in the little theatricals of the literary essay she found it easy, even pleasurable, to be kind, and she enjoyed a blessed release from the ferocious emotions

that threaded much of her daily life. Thus she can review what is plainly a perfectly terrible novel by John Galsworthy (*Beyond*) and convey every nuance of its awfulness, yet in a manner neither bitchy nor in any serious sense hypocritical, and so sunny as to leave even Galsworthy, perhaps, feeling more bewildered than scared: "When we think it all over at the end we remember, and this we mean sincerely and not satirically, a great many most delightful dogs."

A question about seriousness seems to arise in regard to her. For half the delight of the adventure of this kind of writing is to see what new experience or style of thought and manners she can "try out", and she has such a talent for the "straight-faced" manner that it is not always clear when straight-facedness is doing duty for true seriousness. When she pays tribute to the "sense of harmony" and "simplicity" of Conrad's early work (a simplicity which "reveals the largest outlines, the deepest instincts"), the tone is very persuasive, but one does not sense much actual engagement with Conrad.

## Pioneering perceptions

Andrew Sanders

JENNIFER UGLOW  
George Eliot  
273pp. Virago. Paperback, £4.95.  
0860684008

"Although the fate of her heroines may make us uncomfortable", Jennifer Uglow concludes, George Eliot's art, like the artist's own life, "shirks very little and questions much". This book is an honest and straightforward rereading of the novelist and her novels. The study opens with the acknowledgement that Eliot "can never be drawn easily into a feminist net", and Uglow never "constricts or strangles her subject. Eliot herself was insistent that 'there is no subject on which I am more inclined to hold my peace and learn, than on the 'Woman Question'; and the only one of her heroines who could be described as affirmatively answering that question is Romola de Bardi. But Romola works out her independence in the fifteenth not the nineteenth century, in the Florence of the Renaissance, not in St Ogg's, or Treby Magna or Middlemarch.

Uglow examines all the novels closely and she sees them in relation to each other as part of a developing argument. It is in the retelling of the often fraught life-story that she also firmly establishes Eliot as a female "pioneer", though she willingly allows that the novelist knew that it was in the world of men that genius flourishes

and that "that was where she wanted to be". As Uglow sees it, the Marian Evans Lewes who eschewed a public feminist commitment was the victim of an "emotional muddle", which derived from "an unspecified inner fear" about her independent position and her work as a writer. Each of the later novels cost her an agony of doubt and headaches which were in part, it seems, psychosomatic. There was a longing for convention which countered the unconventionality, and the strong religious aspirations of characters in the novels complement the carefully considered agnosticism of the novelist.

Uglow notes of *Middlemarch* that the "delicate meshing of one life with another in a complex community" is also the testing ground for what she terms Eliot's "emotional elite". When that elite is a predominantly feminine one, inspired by Antigone or by St Teresa, it is tempered by a recognition that sex also imposes boundaries. There may be a preoccupation with "wider horizons" in *Daniel Deronda*, but Gwendolen Harleth, like the earlier heroines, is forced into an awareness of limits and borders beyond which she may not safely pass. For Eliot's women the passage into a wider freedom must await the mysterious movement of the future.

In the two complex late novels, *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda*, Uglow traces a new concern with the interweaving of the social, intellectual and moral, and this in turn is related to biography. In August 1871 the Leweses took a cottage in Surrey while the

But then, the truth is, she has a strong yearning for harmony and simplicity but almost no rapport with it at all. This comes out in a tiresomely mock-modest and deeply unconvincing essay ("The Perfect Language") on ancient Greek. She adduces various rather unremarkable apophthegms from the Greek Anthology (unremarkable in the Loeb translation, at least) as evidence of the "miracle" of Greek ("We hear the voice of men whose outlook on life was perfectly direct and unclouded"); and the reason why, for a moment, she thus slips into classroom cliché is, plainly, that she is making out of Greek a never-never land of health and serenity. This, for us who know her life, is a poignant reflection. But to think of Woolf, of all writers, pining for a "perfect language"!

Not so much, then, to pay homage to the grand, the general, the far-all-time, as, with a mind unhampered by general categories, to do justice to the unique, the precious and rare specimen, and thereby, for the space of an article, to extend the boundaries of one's own being: this was Woolf's theory of reviewing,

and it is a good one. She is at her very best (and in this volume she is often at her very best) in the airy persiflage of an essay ("A Scribbling Dame") on Eliza Haywood. For her subject - worthless scholarship about a worthless writer, or the complicity of new Academe with old Grub Street - she finds a wonderful simile, which fertilizes her whole essay. "There are in the Natural History Museum certain little insects so small that they have to be gummed to the cardboard with the lightest of fingers, but each of them, as one observes with constant surprise, has its fine Latin name spreading far to the right and left of the miniature body." It prompts her, not just to fellow-feeling for Haywood, "this faded and antique specimen of the domestic house fly", but to intelligent speculation about "that long and very intricate process of living and reading and writing which so mysteriously alters the form of literature", causing Jane Austen to write novels instead of "a few exquisite lost letters", and to an affectionate vision of the whole inky, hand-to-mouth, writing and publishing life, a scene much dearer to her than Attica.

novelist pondered the composition of *Middlemarch*. In the evenings the couple read physics, chemistry, "or any other wisdom if our heads are at par". If they were not at par the couple resorted to "folly", to the poems of Musset "or something akin to them". This rigorous blending of science and art, of writing and reading, is reflected in the imagery of the developing novel, an imagery which Uglow sees as juxtaposing "male" and "female" perceptions. Later, in *Daniel Deronda*, the "male" characteristics are "hard, arid, rigid, rule-bound, individualistic", the "female" "soft, fluid, flexible, tolerant, self-suppressing", but they are no longer crudely divided between men and

women. The sexes are fused, their qualities transposed, which partly explains the awkwardness of Daniel Deronda himself and also explains the author's difficulties in trying to persuade readers of the validity of his mission. That mission was in part for a more enlightened and tolerant future in which co-operation replaced competition and oppression. George Eliot would almost certainly have been appalled at the prospect of her novels being claimed for an exclusive branch of "women's studies". It is a major strength of Jennifer Uglow's book that it readily recognizes the virtue of Eliot's resolute questioning of categories.

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## Cracks in the image

Anne Whitmarsh

CLAUDE FRANCIS and FERNANDE GONTIER  
Simone de Beauvoir  
Translated by Lisa Nesselson  
412pp. Sidgwick and Jackson. £15.  
028399391X

This is the first biography of Simone de Beauvoir, and it is easy to see why. Beauvoir was an autobiographer on the grand scale, pre-empting others by producing four volumes of memoirs and other works, including novels, drawing on her life. Claude Francis and Fernande Gontier retell what she has already brilliantly told: her emergence from a bourgeois upbringing into an unconventional relationship with Jean-Paul Sartre that was to last fifty years, during which time she won fame as a writer, an existentialist philosopher, a revolutionary and a feminist. Whereas Beauvoir shares with the reader her passions, ambitions and disappointments, her personal experience of world events and her wide circle of friends, many of them famous, Francis and Gontier only offer a pale reflection.

Beauvoir's own account has great qualities and its own validity, but it has to be seen as partial; it is a selective reconstruction of her

life. Francis and Gontier appear to recognize this but they do not attempt any critical reassessment. There is some welcome new material - an identification of the people behind the pseudonyms used by Beauvoir, details of her sometimes ambiguous relationships with younger women, Nelson Algren's view of their affair - but it is not developed and remains at the level of gossip.

It is instructive to compare the original French text with this English edition. Beauvoir having died in the meantime. Previously omitted material is now found in a new introduction and detailed notes, in which the authors cite many cases of Beauvoir contradicting her own evidence. A more significant revision to the last chapter describes how her role as Sartre's intellectual confidante and sole guardian of Sartrean thought was usurped in his last years by his young secretary, Benny Lévy, and to some extent by his adoptive daughter.

These few modifications contrast uneasily with the bulk of the book, in which Beauvoir's version of events is accepted at face value, the tone is deferential, Beauvoir's relationship with Sartre sentimentalized and her genuine achievements crudely overstated. Quite apart from errors the gushing translation actually succeeds in exaggerating the already fulsome prose of the original.



# NB

## Spanish notes

Sheelagh Ellwood

In the nineteenth century, the English writer and traveller in Spain, Richard Ford, explained the country's age-old and apparently insoluble problems by way of the following anecdote, "which [Spain's] children loved to tell":

When Ferdinand III captured Seville and died, being a saint he escaped purgatory, and Santiago presented him to the Virgin, who forthwith desired him to ask any favours for beloved Spain. The monarch petitioned for oil, wine and corn - conceded; for sunny skies, brave men and pretty women - allowed; for cigars, relics, garlic and bulls - by all means; for a good government - "Nay, nay," said the Virgin, "that never can be granted, for, were it bestowed not an angel would remain a day longer in heaven."

Perhaps it was Ferdinand III, rather than the Under-Secretariat for Tourism, who invented the current Spanish promotional slogan, "Everything under the sun". But given the massive wave of strikes, demonstrations and one-day protests which took place all over Spain in the spring of 1987, there is a general belief that the Virgin can still rest easy.

As post-Franco governments have been anxious to impress upon outsiders, the "new" Spain is more open in its attitudes and less uniform in its appearance than the old. The official emphasis is almost exclusively on what Spain is, or will be, while there is a marked reluctance to examine what it has been. In 1986, the fiftieth anniversary of the beginning of the Spanish Civil War was more widely commemorated and more seriously discussed beyond Spain's frontiers than within them. While crews from television networks the world over tramped round film archives and battlefields, the Spanish State-owned public television company decided to delay until 1987 the showing of a series it was preparing on the war. And while the survivors of the International Brigades were fêted in London, veterans of the defeated Republican army in Spain complained bitterly that after twelve years of democracy and with a left-wing government in power, many of their number still had not been granted a war veteran's pension.

Why the reticence? The answer does not lie in any hypersensitivity on the part of Spaniards

at large. The vast majority of the population now belongs to post-war generations, for whom the "opening of old wounds" argument is not valid. The crowds of people who flocked to the Civil War exhibition put on by the Ministry of Culture in 1981 and the thousands of copies sold of Ediciones Urbi's illustrated edition of Hugh Thomas's *The Spanish Civil War* (Madrid, 1979) bore ample witness to that. But in 1986 there were two other important events in the political calendar: a national referendum, in March, to decide whether Spain would or would not stay in Nato, and general elections in June. Keeping a low official profile on anything which might be controversial, even if that included the major event in twentieth-century Spanish history, was part of the Socialist government's way of "going to the country". Thus, for example, the joint project of a historian and a sociologist to write a historical and geographical guide to the Civil War, submitted in December 1985 to the Ministry of Culture, got no further because, they were told, "It wouldn't be politic just now. The Minister wouldn't like it."

To mark the fiftieth - or fifty-first - anniversary of the war, the largest selling historical journal in Spain, *Historia 16*, is currently running a twenty-four-part special series devoted to the conflict, which includes over forty interviews with well-known figures from both camps. Unsurprisingly, they are finding it difficult to persuade right-wing survivors to talk. Painful memories? Fear of reprisals? Bad conscience? Perhaps a little of all three, but then the victors in the Spanish Civil War have never been in the habit of explaining their actions, for Francoism functioned on the basis of *orden y mando* ("I order and command"), not according to a belief in persuasion and reasoning. Since Franco's death in 1975, a plethora of carefully filtered memoirs has been published by former members of his régime, but few of their authors are willing actually to talk about their experiences. And when they do, their memories are considerably more selective, their account notably less rich in detail, than those of their Republican contemporaries. "It's all in the

book", they say. Except that invariably it isn't. It isn't necessarily in the archives, either, for many of those who held official posts under Franco removed or destroyed large quantities of documents on vacating the corridors of power. One sometimes wonders how it is possible that Spain's present is as normal as it is when there have been so many initiatives to deny, mutilate or destroy its past.

"The best way for us writers to be is dead." Such is the emphatic opinion of Alvaro Pombo, BA in Philosophy from Birkbeck College, London, ten years a telephonist in the London offices of the Banco Urquijo and currently one of Spain's most widely acclaimed novelists. His ironical comment no doubt reflects the fact that his career as a writer has been neither rapid nor easy. Though in the previous ten years he had published three novels, it was not until the award of the prestigious Herralde prize in 1983 for his semi-autobiographical *El herede de las mansardas de Mansard* that Pombo's name began to be known and his work sought after by more than a handful of readers. He attributes his difficulties to what he sees as two important preferences in Spanish publishing - for "best sellers" (pronounced "be-selér"), which often means translations of works which have already proved successful abroad, and for writers below the age of forty. At forty-eight Pombo's pessimism is largely subjective, but there are other, more objective problems in Spanish publishing: competition from abroad (the rest of Europe in particular), the urgent need for technological and structural renovation whose cost is estimated to be £20-£30 million, VAT on books at 6 per cent and the fact that Spaniards rarely read books. In a survey done last month by Spain's largest circulation national daily, *El País*, it was found that only between 15 and 18 per cent of young Spaniards read for pleasure.

Is the Spanish publishing panorama really so sombre? It would seem to depend on who is considered.

## In brief

*Listen!*, a small boxed volume of early Mayakovsky poems and some Futurist drawings, is the fifth beautifully produced book from Julian Rothenstein's Redstone Press. (£7.95, 1870003 25X). Previous productions include two novels in wood cuts by the Belgian-born Frans Masereel, and forthcoming is a selection from the work of the great unsung Mexican print-maker, José Guadalupe Posada. An Arts Council exhibition and a television film on Posada's work are planned, but neither he nor Masereel were published in Britain in their lifetimes, or indeed until now. In tending to largely forgotten and uncommercial artists, Rothenstein feels that his press fills a gap in the market (and the sale of 3,000 Redstone Masereels would seem to bear this out). But he is primarily a designer, not a publisher, and it is perhaps this, and the size of his (essentially one-man) operation, that explain the real success of the books. Can this quality be maintained when production leaves his living room and Masereel reaches a larger public? (With mixed feelings, Rothenstein has sold the paper back right to the second Masereel novel, *A Passionate Journey*, to Penguin.)



An image from *The Idea* by Frans Masereel (Redstone Press, 21 Colville Terrace, London W11. £9.95, 1870003 05 5).

On October 1 the Centre for Policy Studies induced Charles Moore, Noel Annan, T. E. Utley, Clive Wainwright and Raymond Plant to comment on a pamphlet by Gertrude Himmelfarb on the subject of Victorian values, while David Willets of the CPS tried to explain his project of rekindling those values. (His idea is to encourage the government to adopt policies in education and welfare which will wean the workers from dependency.) Himmelfarb's uncharacteristically slight piece was hardly mentioned in what was less a discussion than a medley of opinions, distinctly varied in their degree of expertise. Plant observed that it was illogical to claim on the one hand that the State could not alter individuals' economic behaviour, and on the other that it should intervene to alter their values. By the time Wainwright, sonorously irrelevant and implicitly demanding lots more public money for museums, and Utley, wry but rambling, had finished with them there was very little left of Victorian values that seemed worth rekindling.

The tone of the rest of the evening was set by Charles Moore, who said that he was not an expert on Victorian values, but that he was not thereby disqualified from talking about them. The best intervention came from Gavin Stamp, who was an expert, observing that the most prominent Victorian values were celebrations of a public, not a private ethic. Willets and most other speakers made statements about what had gone on in Victorian Britain, how and why its economy had grown and its welfare system developed, which bore only the most distant relation to what is almost universally accepted to have been the country's experience. Sir Keith Joseph, presiding, commented on the "inappropriateness" of preaching to people what their attitudes should be, while Willets revealed that Mrs Thatcher now wishes that she had referred to "eternal" rather than "Victorian" values. We have been warned.

## Letters

### Poets of Protest

Sir, - Valentina Polukhina's letter (September 11-17) complains that, mine of August 14 ascribed unabating protest to Yevtushenko: in fact I conceded that he possibly "has softened or been softened since" he wrote the unimpeachable lines "against the unabating tide of nihilism in Russia". I made no "aesthetic judgment" (pace Polukhina) or comparison of Yevtushenko's poetry to Brodsky's. I simply evidenced Yevtushenko (pace Brodsky) throwing stones in directions not "officially sanctioned and approved".

Someone who seeks to belittle Yevtushenko's outcry in *Baby Yar* by branding it "strong rhetoric" might do better to substantiate and clarify her own. Thus my letters of 1981-2 did not defend Voznesensky "against Brodsky", but against your reviewer Carol Rumens's misquotations from his verse and her uncalculated comparisons of it to Brodsky's. I cited the fact that Voznesensky's poem about Chagall (the display and reproduction of whose work was then still banned in the Soviet Union) had "consistently been forbidden publication or declamation, amongst many poems more subversive of Soviet prestige and challenging to state security than any of Brodsky's published poetry in English. This is not to disparage Brodsky, but, given the hatred, paranoia and guilt towards Jews sustained by the Soviet *Realpolitik*, it's his Jewishness in itself which (like Chagall's) poses such an implacable threat."

Voznesensky, now a cultural adviser to Gorbachev, has just organized a major retrospective of some 300 paintings by Chagall at Moscow's Pushkin Museum. It's largely at this poet's instigation, again, that *Dr Zhivago* is about to appear at last in the Soviet Union. Let's hope the complete works of Mandelstam, Tsvetaeva, Brodsky and other strong but dissident Russian voices will also be officially welcomed forthwith and heard without inhibition in their own country.

It seems presumptuous and superficial, though, of Ms Polukhina to suggest that Russia's "best poets" are all in exile, and that the sufferings of dissidents and continuing suppressions or distortions of their work are directly attributable to the apparent success and freedom of Yevtushenko and Voznesensky.

As opposed to the unrestricted ease in world travels claimed for Yevtushenko by Polukhina, I've experienced an inkling of the constraints Voznesensky and others who have stayed in Russia have been under. Having received an enthusiastic response from Voznesensky and Bela Akhmadulina at the prospect of taking part in the launch of *Poetry Olympics* at Westminster Abbey in 1980, I wrote asking the Moscow Writers' Union to sanction exit visas for them to come and read. The application was unacknowledged for some weeks, and after several reminders, refused. Our impression that this was because the authorities had caught wind of the participation of the exiled dissident Edward Limonov was reinforced when Voznesensky did read at the following year's Olympics. Plans for a Soviet television suit to film his performance were abruptly cancelled, Voznesensky told me, when it was discovered that the Jewish émigré Eugene

Dubnov was also reading.

Polukhina calls me both anarchist and millionaire-defender, and your column "In brief" (September 18-24) thinks me a "champion of Yevtushenko": I've long enjoyed his verse and published it, but hope I'm a more objective and straightforward arts worker and champion of poetry itself than these labels imply. Thus I've included émigré Russians (Naoum Odnopozov, Dmitri Savitski) in *New Departures* magazines alongside Voznesensky and Yevtushenko. My argument remains that it all becomes poets who would be believed to "bad-mouth" their own kind as viciously as Brodsky was reported by Christopher Hitchens to have done Yevtushenko, without good cause.

Valentina Polukhina makes Yevtushenko exclusively responsible for Andropov's issuing Brodsky's "one-way ticket to the West" in 1972. If this is the whole truth, Brodsky has cause, and all dishonour to Yevtushenko. But in the absence of more factual details, and with Polukhina so tendentious and simplistic on other subjects, it's hard to believe that can be all there was and is to this one.

MICHAEL HOROVITZ.  
*Poetry Olympics / New Departures*, Piedmont, Bisleigh, Stroud, Gloucestershire.

### Jack Johnson

Sir, - I should like to draw your readers' attention to what I believe to be a number of factual errors and misconceptions in Brian Lee's review (Commentary, August 28) of a production of Howard Sackler's play *The Great White Hope*, which deals with the life and career of Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight champion of the world.

According to Professor Lee it was only after Johnson defeated Tommy Burns in 1908 that white fighters were willing to face Johnson in the ring, whereas "initially" (whatever that may mean in the context of Johnson's career) such was not the case. At the turn of the century, boxing was the only sport in which blacks were allowed to compete against whites, and Johnson, even before his bout with Burns, had fought quite a number of white boxers, including the legendary Joe Choynski, as well as George Gardner, Sandy Ferguson, Joe Butler and the future "cheese champion" Marvin Hart. Nevertheless, ever since John L. Sullivan had drawn the colour line at fighting a black man for the heavyweight title, all subsequent champions had followed suit (as Johnson would himself once he became champion), and in a famous bar-room confrontation with the then title-holder Jim Jeffries, Johnson was rebuffed in his request for a match. Johnson, incidentally, in his very next fight took revenge of sorts on Jeff by knocking out his opponent, who happened to be Jeff's brother Jack.

Johnson's chance came when Jeffries retired undefeated in 1904. In the scramble for the crown Marvin Hart and Jack Root were matched for what was considered by some to be a title fight and which ended with Hart putting his man away. Hart then lost to Tommy Burns in a go refereed by the retired Jeffries, who proclaimed Burns the new champion. Johnson now tenaciously pursued Burns for nearly two years looking for a match. Finally,

on Boxing Day (1), 1908, the two met in Sydney, Australia, with Johnson giving Burns such a savage beating that the police stopped the fight in the fourteenth round.

With Johnson the ostensible heavyweight champion, "the hunt began for a 'great white hope' who could reclaim the championship and thus restore the pride and power of WASP America", as Lee puts it. Now, while it is true that white America looked for a champion to restore the honour of the race, the champion they longed for was none other than Jim Jeffries, who although now retired for nearly five years, was still universally regarded as the true heavyweight champion. The call for Jeffries to come out of retirement was first raised by none other than Jack London, who, in the last paragraph of his account of the Burns-Johnson bout (which he covered for the *New York Herald*), demanded that Jeff "must emerge from his all-farm and remove that smile from Johnson's face". The fact is, there were no credible white heavies on the scene at all - the only challenge to Johnson came from the middleweight champion Stanley Ketchel, who was knocked out by Johnson in their bout of October 1909. Jeff now yielded to the clamour for him to come out of retirement and the two finally met in Reno, Nevada, on July 4, 1910 (not 1911 as Lee writes), with Johnson emerging victorious in the fifteenth round when the fight was stopped to avoid what was obviously going to be a win by a knockout.

Now, it is widely presumed that the expression "white hope" came to be applied to Johnson's prospective white challengers upon his defeat of Burns in 1908, but an examination of contemporary sources does not, I believe, show this to be the case. That it was Jim Jeffries who was regarded as the original "white hope" is clear from a column by Tad Dorgan, the eminent cartoonist and chronicler of "the sweet science", which appeared in the *New York Evening Journal* of June 29, 1910, in which he writes that among the nicknames given to Jeffries by sports writers was "The White Man's Hope". The earliest citation for "white hope" which I have been able to uncover is from a column by the same author which appeared in the *Journal* of October 27 of the same year (the earliest citation in the Supplement to the *OED* is from 1911), and Tad was quite explicit that the "white hope" phenomenon was a consequence of Johnson's victory over Jeffries when he wrote in the *Journal* of August 5, 1912, "Jack Johnson, by defeating Jeffries, started all this 'White Hope' trouble".

LEONARD ZWILLING.  
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### 'The Closing of the American Mind'

Sir, - May I assure your readers that Allan Bloom is a decent man. To couple him with Colonel North, to smear him with guilt by association, is, moreover, unfair and silly. As a liberal critic of both the doctrines and practices of the Straussians, I found the anti-intellectualism of David Ries's essay (September 4-11) particularly offensive, since it would seem to vindicate the main claims of *The Closing of the American Mind*.

JUDITH N. SHKLAR.  
Harvard University, Cambridge, Massachusetts.

### 'The Palestinian Catastrophe'

Sir, - Michael Palumbo, in *The Palestinian Catastrophe*, drawing upon United Nations archives recently released, builds up a detailed account of atrocities frequently committed by the Zionists in Palestine in 1948. In his review (September 4-11), which does not attempt to rebut Palumbo's charges, Elton Salmon asks rhetorically if it is possible "such outrages could have been kept hidden all these years?" I would suggest he has just not been looking in the right places. Simha Flapan, for example, in *The Birth of Israel*, substantiates Palumbo's findings, as did Naom Chomsky, in *The Fateful Triangle* and other writings.

BRIAN JOHNSTON.  
Department of Drama, Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15213.

### Commemorating the Anschluss

Sir, - Reginald Thomas's response (Letters, October 2-8) to Robert Knight's "Austrian notes" is, in its attempt at minimizing 1930s Austrian antisemitism, highly misleading. He writes, "many Jews chose Austria as a safe haven when Hitler came to power". Certainly this was the case; but crucially, and as has been well documented in a number of studies, many of these Jews soon returned to Germany, where, at the time, popular and localized antisemitism fell well short of the virulence with which it operated in Austria.

CHRISTOPHER GOULD.  
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### Oscar Wilde

Sir, - How odd that Gore Vidal (October 2-8) should have "noticed" nothing new in Richard Ellmann's account of Wilde's involvement with Lord Alfred Douglas, when there are revelations on every page: among them, a new scandal in 1893, a new letter from the Marquess of Queensberry and a new interpretation of the famous visiting card. Readers less intent than Gore Vidal on merely being noticeable will surely notice more.

JOHN STOKES.  
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### 'Parallel Distributed Processing'

Sir, - Anyone who publicly questions orthodox Chomskyan assumptions about language knows that he must expect a sour riposte from Massachusetts, so it was no surprise to read Steven Pinker and Alan Prince's letter (September 25 - October 1) about my enthusiastic review of David E. Rumelhart and James L. McClelland's *Parallel Distributed Processing*. Most of Pinker and Prince's points seem to boil down either to the statement, "The PDP approach must be wrong because it contradicts the orthodox theory", or to "The PDP approach is valueless because it does not yet explain all truths about language". One of their remarks, though, is more telling. An assumption of the model of child language development criticized by Pinker and Prince was that, as children's speech develops, the proportion of regular to irregular verbs in the speech addressed to them rises. This sounds like common sense, since very simple and common verbs tend to be irregular while less-frequent verbs are overwhelmingly regular, but Pinker and Prince claim it is wrong: "The ratio of irregular to regular verbs in parents' speech and in children's own vocabulary does not change during the crucial developmental stages."

I do not know what evidence Pinker and Prince have for parents' speech. They discuss the case of children's vocabularies in detail in a recent Occasional Paper of the MIT Center for Cognitive Science, "On Language and Connectionism". Page 139 quotes figures for the proportion of regular to irregular verb-types in the speech of three children at five developmental stages, and it is true that for each child the figures fluctuate around 50 per cent with no steady upward trend.

However, the force of this is undermined by figures which they also give for total size of verb vocabulary for each child at each stage. For all three children the sequence of five figures shows drops as well as rises - "Eve", for instance, is claimed to have fifty-eight verbs in her vocabulary at Stage Four and only forty-five at Stage Five. This must surely imply that the verbs which the children were observed to utter were only a subset, perhaps a small fraction, of the verbs known at the respective stages; if so, the verbs observed will have tended to be the high-frequency ones, so it is quite possible that the regular/irregular ratio in the children's observed utterances remained constant while the ratio in the speech addressed to them rose, as assumed by Rumelhart and McClelland.

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## The periodicals: *Revue des sciences humaines*

Howard Davies

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The twilight eye which gazes from the cover of the latest issue of *Revue des sciences humaines* heralds 200 pages of critical appreciation of Georges Bataille. Recognizably, it is the "migratory eye" described by Barthes - the one which, as readers of Bataille will know, is capable of appearing in penile and vaginal locations as well as in more conventional hemispherical orbits.

To a certain extent, the artwork and the elegant contemporary packaging of this quarterly review are deceptive, for despite recent numbers devoted to Alfred Jarry and Klossowski, it is not merely one of the many French cottage publications celebrating lingering avant-gardes. *RSH* has an impressive history: founded as *Revue d'histoire de la philosophie* in 1927 (the very year in which Bataille began composing his *Histoire de l'art*), it became the *Revue d'histoire de la philosophie et d'histoire générale de la civilisation* in 1933. Only in 1947, with the redesignation of the Faculty of Letters of the University of Lille, did it adopt its present title. It then forsook its previous multi-disciplinary and became an essentially literary publication.

Before embracing the *sciences humaines*, the Faculty of Letters had been dominated by anglicists. Thus it was that *RSH* celebrated the Liberation with a flourish of foreign contributions from the young Richard Cobb, on leave from British High Command in Brussels; Raymond

Mortimer of the *New Statesman* and the BBC; Robert Spaight, actor and French correspondent of *Time* and *Tide*. The English presence soon declined, however, and *RSH* subsequently became the province of French academics and in particular of those who might be called the radical literary critics of the 1970s - men like Philippe Bonafant and Jean Decotignies of Lille and Jean Bellemain-Noël and Claude Dochet of Vincennes, readers, presumably, of Bataille's *Critique* and of *Tel Quel*.

The past fifteen years have yielded a variety of categories of material: issues on moments in literary history (naturalism, socialist realism), on theoretical problems (quotation, reception), on genres (*réels de vie*), on individual writers from Rousseau to Duras, on the interfaces of literature with medicine, music and painting and on specific themes (ballooning, myths of the origin of language, sleep and war). It is a mixture which is not unpredictable, but which displays the inventiveness brought by the best literary periodicals to supposedly familiar objects of study. The house style tends towards the prevailing French mode of lucid erudition; it avoids inflexible interpretative schemata (although psychoanalysis is all-pervasive) and favours commentators who are prepared to enter *dans le délire* of the writers under consideration. This does not mean syncretistic mimicry, but a participation which can be sometimes gratulatory, sometimes corrosive. Philippe Bonafant on Céline and Alain Buisine on Sartre in recent issues are excellent examples, as is the Bataille number.

*RSH*, in fact, has long kept its eye on Bataille. Back in 1944, Jean Grenier, Camus's mentor, delivered an assessment of *L'Expérience intérieure*, the essay which Sartre had set out to demolish the year before. Grenier's at-

titude towards Bataille's text was one of guarded admiration; he was prepared to allow it "an undeniable originality, despite the evident influence of Nietzsche and Breton" and to rank it, with Camus's *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, as "one of the books which best capture the prevailing mood". Such was the buffeting handed out by Sartre that *RSH*'s 1987 appreciation approaches Bataille as someone whose reputation owes much to having been famously and rudely misunderstood. (The contributors are all in the *mourmour* of Bataille; exposition is not their brief, and anyone seeking an introduction to his work should turn first to the recent issue of the *Magazine Littéraire* devoted to him.)

Francis Marmande, one of the prominent *Batailliens* who writes here (with other such established authorities as Jean-Louis Baudry, Denis Hollier and Jean-Michel Roy), tells elsewhere how Sartre, dancing with Bataille at one of Michel Leiris's fiestas in 1943, was heard to observe to his partner: "You're Being, and I'm Nothingness." Of all the contributors, one would expect Hollier, whose *Politique de la prose* showed little mercy to Sartre, to turn this formulation to the advantage of Bataille. This, however, he elects not to do, even though his fascinating exploration of the latter's "thanatophilia" makes of it a mode of commitment configured as an invasion of *engagement existentiel*. Similarly, his discussion of Bataille's use of the Don Juan myth prompts no evaluative juxtaposition with Camus. Perhaps this is because he prefers to give the last word to Freud, as do - implicitly or explicitly - many of the contributors to *RSH*. This makes the review representative; it does not prevent it from having a colourful and stimulating character of its own.

### AUTHOR, AUTHOR

Competition No 356

Readers are invited to identify the sources of the three quotations which follow and to send us the answer so that they reach this office not later than October 30. A prize of £20 is offered for the first correct set of answers opened on that date. The selection and results will appear on November 6.

1 O my America! my new-found land,  
My kingdom, safest when with one man man'd,  
My mine of precious stones, my Empyre,  
How best am I in this discovering thee!

2 For the savage people in many places of America,  
except the government of small families, the concord  
whereof dependeth on natural law, have no government  
at all; and live in this day in that brutish manner, as I said before.

3 For I ask, whether in the wild woods and  
uninhabited waste of America, left to nature without  
any government, village, or husbandry, a thousand  
wretched and wretched inhabitants as  
they are, and live in this day in that brutish  
manner, as I said before.

Competition No 366

Winner: Francis Wyndham

Answers:

1 And I would love you all the day,  
Every night would kiss and play,  
If with me you'd fondly stray  
Over the hills and far away.  
John Gay, "Were I laid on Greenland's coast",  
from *The Beggar's Opera*.

2 The gauger walked with willing foot,  
And eye the gauger played the flute;  
And what should Master Gauger play  
But Over the hills and far away?  
R. L. Stevenson, "A Song of the Road".

3 The gradations of the dark  
Were like an underworld of death, but for the spark  
In the Gypsy boy's black eyes as he played and  
stamped his tune,  
"Over the hills and far away", and a crescent moon.  
Edward Thomas, "The Gypsy".



## COMMENTARY

## Dramatic conventions

David Nokes

Harry's Kingdom  
BBC1  
The Interrogation of John  
BBC2

After watching last week's Prix Italia awards, the chairman of the Drama jury, David Rose of Channel 4, remarked: "What we have seen only reflects the worsening level of TV drama in Europe." The BBC, which took this year's Prix Italia award with *After Pilkington*, currently has two regular slots for single plays, Sunday Premiere and Screenplay. Last week's offerings, *Harry's Kingdom* and *The Interrogation of John*, might suggest a context for discussion of Rose's comment.

*Harry's Kingdom* was itself a prize-winner in the Radio Times drama competition. Unusual in being a first play by a sixty-two-year-old retired company chairman, Ron Pearson, it was in other respects entirely conventional. As a tale of double-dealing among double-glazing salesmen it exuded a kind of parodic authenticity. It had that vicarious quality of scandalous expose that can turn the most mundane office routines into a potential tabloid feature or situation comedy. With a cast heavily dependent on cameo performances from such reliable character actors as Timothy West, Peter Vaughan and Harry Fowler, and with a confusion of plot-lines stretching out beyond the final credits, *Harry's Kingdom* had the feel of a pilot for a future series.

What it lacked was any sense of dramatic concentration. It began, perversely enough, with its climax, at the salesmen's annual jamboree, known in the trade as a "seminar". These opening scenes successfully captured an atmosphere of PR glitz and revelry by rote. Flash Harrys in their hired tuxedos glad-handed each other round the bar before soft-footing it upstairs with each other's wives. Thereafter the play struggled hard to develop a theme as the bedroom conquerors of the night before became the board-room victims of the morning after. But all it produced were the clichés of a sub-thriller genre: long, aimless tracking shots in cars; conspiratorial meetings in underground car-parks; the jargon of computer hacking. A fatal car crash provided a melo-

dramatic cue for the play's final message that boys will be boys. Recalling early playground humiliations King sought to justify his bully-boy methods, but already the new boys in the school were forming a gang of their own. Although polished and funny, the appeal of *Harry's Kingdom* was mainly on the surface, in a spatter of idiomatic dialogue, a strip-tease of sexual high-jinks and a spray-on realism.

*The Interrogation of John*, by Malcolm McKay was a very different matter. This was, above all, a play, with a strong dramatic momentum. Shot entirely in the studio, it was, the kind of play that television used to do supremely well. The tense realistic police-station setting gave it something of a *Z Cars* atmosphere, while the studied use of black and white symbolism, though sometimes overdone, suggested the style of black-and-white films. The play's claustrophobic effect was strengthened by the absence of location shots. No sleek patrol cars crept up in the night to arrest the suspect; no teams of officers combed the wasteland for his discarded jacket. Instead, the director Nicholas Renton created his own space with a stylish use of interiors. The slatted light from a window was an effect borrowed from film noir; the tightly angled shots and repeated close-ups heightened tension and aggression. The interrogation itself used some familiar formulas. There was the hard man (Bill Paterson), an aggressive Scot whose interrogation methods relied more on fists than fatherly advice, and the soft man (Denis Quilley), an avuncular Mancunian, coaxing out a confession with the patience of a priest. A similar Jekyll and Hyde device was used to characterize the suspect. Was he John the hard man with dyed blond hair, intent on brazening it out? Or Billy, whose dark roots were showing through, desperate to confess his killings? Yet although the play's polarities were obvious, it developed into a compelling psychological drama. This was mainly due to a brilliant performance by Michael Fitzgerald as the psychopathic suspect. Whether snarling, cowering or smiling with bland disdain, he carried complete conviction as a man torn between equal compulsions to conceal or to confess. *The Interrogation of John* was an excellent example of the virtues of studio drama, and a reminder that evocative locations are no substitute for a strong script.



"Mr Murray, Gloria Swanson and Debe Daniels", 1928, a watercolour by Stephen Tennant, which will be auctioned by Sotheby's at the sale of the contents of Wilsford Manor, Wiltshire on October 14 and 15. Further evidence of Tennant's taste for "vampire looks and bee-stung lips" can be found in the sale in his bulging Hollywood scrapbooks and in the many dramatically posed portraits of him as an exquisite youth. Works by Tennant and his friend Rex Whistler can also be seen at an exhibition at the Michael Parkin Gallery, 11 Motcomb Street, London SW1 until November 6.

## A tradition of the emotions

Oliver Taplin

EURIPIDES  
Medea  
Olivier Theatre

As the Olivier auditorium burst into near-hysterical applause at the end of Yukio Ninagawa's *Medea*, did anyone (else), I wonder, give a clap or two for Euripides' *Medea*? Probably not. The bravos were for the controlled energy of the actors, the fluid precision of the choreography, the lavish inventiveness of the costumes, and Ninagawa's directorial inspiration. Yet Euripides did not merely supply a basic myth (and it is more than possible that he was the first ever to have *Medea* murder her own children) nor just the script – which was closely adhered to, so far as I could tell – he contributed the entire form, the entire dramatic and emotional shaping of the work. These were never acknowledged as "classical" or Greek, since the whole was transmuted into a Japanese experience. That was the point; that was what made the production so good.

The Japanese assimilation of Greek tragedy might make an interesting story. I have not heard of any significant productions before the three or four nearly thirty years ago which were performed in the open air by students of Tokyo University and directed by Masaaki Kubo. More recently companies have given Greek tragedy an important place in their repertoire. Ninagawa has directed an *Oedipus* as well as this *Medea* (which was first created in 1978, and has been to Athens, Vancouver, New York and Edinburgh before London).

Why Greek-Japanese tragedy? It may be partly that it gives access to a stream near the source of Western culture without more recent, muddled distractions. And it must be partly the affinities with the "classical" traditions of Far Eastern drama, Nô and to a lesser extent Kabuki. Nô is also set in the heroic past, has poetic diction, all male actors, and a collection of strong passions like horror, anger, and above all pity. Nô aims intensely, according to the great authority Zenmi, at a kind of wishful sadness. And it is here that Ninagawa goes right against traditional Japanese theatre. From the first alarmed words of the Nurse to *Medea's* exultant laugh as she is wafted away in her golden flying-machine, the play is tossed on an ever-dwindling gusting storm of the Greek.

Yet the emotional character of the two genres is very different. While Greek tragedy seeks to arouse a wide and changeable combination of strong passions like horror, anger, and above all pity. Nô aims intensely, according to the great authority Zenmi, at a kind of wishful sadness. And it is here that Ninagawa goes right against traditional Japanese theatre. From the first alarmed words of the Nurse to *Medea's* exultant laugh as she is wafted away in her golden flying-machine, the play is tossed on an ever-dwindling gusting storm of the Greek.

emotions. As *Medea* writhes in agony torn between hatred and maternal productiveness we are worlds away from wishful sadness.

Had this magnificent production been in English, I suspect that the London audience (except perhaps for the Japanese there) would have recoiled, mumbling "hammy", "overplayed", "melodramatic". We have come to associate strong emotion on the stage with realist and psycho-centric drama, not with the stylized production that many "classics" call for. It may be that the genius of Brecht has trailed a red herring here, for he associated "Aristotelian", sympathy-arousing and passionate drama with the realism which he was rejecting in favour of the alienation of "epic" theatre. I suspect that an important reason why this production has been able to persuade English-speaking audiences not to recoil from "melodrama" has been that it is in Japanese. Our emotional guard is down when we find that, despite their foreignness, these people are racked by our feelings. Jason jingles in his all too vulnerable fatherhood, the messenger is disgusted and fascinated by what he has witnessed, *Medea* clasps her maternal breasts at one moment as fervently as she grips the sword the next.

Ninagawa's visual virtuosity is similarly "over the top". Again our theatre has much to learn if it is to escape the bonds of the prosaic and throw off the suffocation of the blanket-term "melodramatic". The black bee-keeper veils of the chorus, *Medea's* ornate wing-like sleeves, cast off to reveal a sheath of red before she embraces the icing-sugar white of her children, the glittering beads which fall down cheeks like tears, the gilded dragons and festoons of the solar chariot – there seem to be no bounds to the unpredictable and unabashed exuberance of his dramatic spectacle.

Another of his great, and instructive, achievements is the way that the large chorus (also played by men) is integrated, while retaining a role quite different from that of the actors. Their movements, choreographed by the Kinnosuke Hanayagi, are mostly in unison, and make enthralling use of the kinetics of the whole body and of voluminous costume. I was only sorry that they spoke rather than sing, and that on the whole the canned music was rather crudely exploited, though it undeniably went to work on the audience's feelings. One sequence was particularly un-Greek: the chorus were so overcome with emotion that they strummed frantically and wordlessly on the mandoline-like shamisen which each carried.

The chorus of Greek tragedy always finds a voice, an expression of poetry, even at the most harrowing moment. But the shamisen were redeemed at the very end, when instead of being macrophoned on the hi-fi, their real, quiet, plaintiveness, plucked, a heart-note of wishful sadness.

## At last an exorcism

Geoffrey A. Hosking examines seven novels, recently published in the Soviet Union, which deal with formerly taboo aspects of the Stalinist era.

Today, as under Khrushchev, the Soviets are conducting an agonizing reappraisal of Stalin. And once again, this is happening with the approval, indeed encouragement (admittedly not unanimous), of the highest party authorities. In view of the traumas they went through the last time they stirred up painful memories, one may well ask why they should choose to go through the process again. Only just over a year ago, in fact, Mikhail Gorbachev was warning against obsession with the past. Obviously he has since come to believe that the re-examination of Stalinism is crucially important. He is right. The fundamental reason for the low morale of the population, the poor productivity of the economy and the lack of vitality in intellectual and cultural life, which together undermine the international standing of the Soviet Union, remains the stifling strait-jacket of political control which Stalin imposed on all aspects of life.

The original reason for this tight control was to concentrate resources on achieving a breakthrough in heavy industry. Everything was sacrificed to this end. But even in industry, as Nikolai Shmelyov, an economist from the Institute of the United States and Canada, pointed out in an important recent article in *Novy mir*, such a system could only guarantee quantity of output. "It could not by its very nature concern itself with improving the quality of production, or achieving optimum results with the minimum of expenditure. Its one aim – gross output – it achieved not in accordance with the laws of economics, but in spite of them. And that 'in spite' meant unimaginable squandering of material and, even more important, human resources." This is the historical legacy which the party now wishes to throw off. But to repudiate a legacy, one must first know what it is. That in turn means facing the full horror of what happened under Stalin, not concealing it under circumlocutions and euphemisms.

Shmelyov sets the example in his article. What he means by the "squandering of human resources" he illustrates by pointing to the collectivization of agriculture of the early 1930s and the accompanying programme of "dekulakization". "At one time the slogan of the 'liquidation of the kulaks as a class' was proclaimed. What actually happened was the abolition of the peasantry as a class." He corroborated this assertion in a recent private report to a research institute attached to the party Central Committee. There he estimated the number of victims of the "dekulakization" at 5 million, and went on to assert that some 17 million Soviet citizens passed through the labour camps between 1937 and 1953.

Shmelyov's report has not appeared in the Soviet press, but the historian Vasilii Polikarpov has published in the mass weekly *Ogonyok* a brief biography of the Old Bolshevik Fyodor Raskolnikov, which is almost equally revealing about the purges. Raskolnikov refused to return from Bulgaria (where he was Soviet ambassador) in 1938, because he guessed that he would be arrested. Instead, he wrote an open letter to Stalin, published in the contemporary émigré press, in which he accused his former comrade of "staging with the help of base fabrications trials which in their absurdity surpass medieval witch-hunts". He went on:

You have forced your supporters to wade in torrent and abhorrence through the blood of their former friends and comrades. . . . You have deprived Soviet scholars, especially in the humanities, of the minimum of intellectual freedom, without which creative work becomes impossible. . . . On the eve of 1937 you are destroying the Red Army, pride and joy of the nation, bastion of its strength.

This passionate indictment is now printed in *Ogonyok*, accompanied by figures which simply confirm the latter statement: they show that Stalin murdered three of the five Field Marshals, three of the five top-rank army commanders, all ten of the second-rank army commanders, fifty out of fifty-seven corps commanders, 154 out of 186 divisional commanders – and so the figures go on, revealed in the cold light of Soviet print here for the first time.

The concern which economists and historians are now displaying for the truth of the Stalin period is most welcome; but it is of recent origin and results from a change in party policy. Novelists have been displaying the same concern for a quarter of a century or more, in fact ever since the first Khrushchev "thaw". During the long years of the Brezhnev "stagnation" they were the sole true custodians of the country's recent past. Only now, with the easing of prohibitions and editorial obstacles, are we able to appreciate the full extent of their efforts. Works written up to twenty years ago are at last being published, and 1987 has seen a remarkable crop of novels which at last confront the full historical reality of the Stalin period.

One powerful example of this type is Boris Mozhaev's *Muzhiki i baby* (Peasants and their Womenfolk), which recently appeared in the regional journal *Don*. Mozhaev has long been one of the most authoritative and fearless commentators on rural life. This novel is the second part of a text published back in 1976, in the heart of so-called "stagnation". The first part described the way of life of the peasants of Mozhaev's native Ryazan province under Lenin's New Economic Policy, a politically somewhat less sensitive period. This new part, however, grapples with the most sensitive period of all, what Mozhaev calls "the last months in the life of the peasant commune, and the destruction of its thousand-year way of life". Taken as a whole, it is probably the most detailed account which has yet appeared in the Soviet Union of the vital months in 1929-30 when the villages were convulsed by the party's precipitate and ill-thought-out turn towards "mass collectivization".

The fate of one of the victims of "dekulakization" – actually a relatively fortunate one – is described in the story *Vas'ka* by Sergei Antonov, published in the journal *Yunost*. He shows the "kulak" girl of the title escaping to Moscow, where she takes part incognito in the hectic, frenzied construction of the underground railway system, while constantly fearing denunciation and arrest. Such concealed outlaws were not uncommon on the swarming building sites of the first Five Year Plans, whose foremen and managers would willingly turn a blind eye in order to attract and hold desperately needed labour.

The adoption of the indiscriminate methods of the command economy caused devastation in the nation's intellectual and cultural life. The important theme of the distortion of scientific research caused by Stalin's ideologists, especially by Lysenko and his associates in the field of genetics, is taken up in two recent novels. Vladimir Dudintsev, whose novel *Not by Bread Alone* caused the major literary stir of the first Khrushchev "thaw", has returned to print, almost for the first time since then, with a novel called *Belye odezhy* (White Garments), written almost twenty years ago, and concerned with an agricultural institute in 1948-9. It describes the life of a semi-underground group at the institute, who reject Lysenko's phoney genetics, and continue their research on the classical principles of plant-breeding until most of them are arrested. One of them, however, survives and develops a new strain of potato, which is highly successful in the post-Stalin period.

Danil Granin has confronted an even more serious taboo in *Zubr* (The Buffalo), a semi-fictionalized biography of the geneticist Nikolai Timofeev-Resovskii, who escaped the destruction of his scientific field by working in Germany in the 1930s and indeed even throughout the war. Most Soviets, including at the time Granin himself, had a brutally simple attitude towards anyone who even appeared to "collaborate" with the Germans. Such people were sent to labour camps when the Red Army moved in 1945, and Timofeev did not escape this fate, though he was subsequently rescued by the director of the Magnitogorsk steel works, and permitted to establish his own semi-penitentiary research institute in exile in the Urals. Granin portrays him (in the other meaning of the word *zubr*) as a survivor from a distant past, a dihard aristocrat, a man of wide culture and selfless devotion to science, who never receives a learned degree and disdains to campaign for his own admission to the Academy of Sciences even when his colleagues are making efforts on his behalf. Granin frequently contrasts him, clearly and explicitly,

with the common run of Soviet intellectuals, people of narrow specialization, pursuing a scientific career for the sake of a comfortable life, and constantly intriguing for honour or advancement. Rescuing the memory of such an inspiring figure required of Granin, as he admits, the overcoming of tenacious prejudices in himself. He also gives an extended and sympathetic evocation of Russian émigré culture of the 1920s and 1930s.

Another powerful popular prejudice of Stalinist provenance is tackled by Anatolii Pristavkin in his novel *Nochevala tuchka zolotaya* (A Golden Cloud at Nightfall – a reference to a poem by Lermontov), published in *Znamya*. It tells the story of the brutally deported peoples of the North Caucasus, and especially of the Chechens. Their fate is seen through the eyes of two orphan brothers evacuated to the area from which the Chechens have only just been removed. Their bewilderment at the deserted villages is gradually cleared up as mysterious incidents turn out to be the result of raids by a few survivors, now outlaws in the hills. Slowly the full horror of what has happened becomes apparent, and the novel moves towards a climax in which one of the brothers is killed, while the other strikes up a friendship with a young Chechen orphaned like himself. The device of the orphan narrator is most effectively deployed by Pristavkin: orphans were direct victims of the social upheavals Stalin unleashed, and were therefore in a sense both enemies and brothers of the deportees.

In the West we often identify Stalinism particularly with the huge wave of arrests which engulfed Soviet society in 1936-9. This key subject is vividly investigated in a posthumous novel by Yuri Trifonov, *Ischemnoenie* (Disappearance), which appeared in *Druzhba narodov*. Trifonov was a novelist who appeared unusually successful in bringing out frank studies of the past during the 1970s, so it is revealing to discover that not even he was able to publish everything he wanted to. In this novel, written over several years preceding his death in 1981, he grasps the core of what he circled around in so many of his works, the destruction of friendship, home and family through the undermining of mutual trust which the arrests and interrogations engendered. The setting, as often before in Trifonov, is the huge grey "government house" on the banks of the Moscow River, where many of the upper *nomenklatura* lived. One sees the families who inhabit it gradually given and destroyed by the spreading waves of incomprehension, fear and distrust. Trifonov excels in showing how historical processes impinge on ordinary people, who go on – what else could they do? – buying clothes, jostling for promotion, celebrating birthdays, even as the monsters of history hover at their door.

All the same, for the Western reader, interested in the political mechanisms which conferred such boundless power on Stalin, perhaps the most interesting novel of 1987 is Anatolii Rybakov's long-awaited *Deti Arbatu* (Children of the Arbat). It is actually a belated product of the Khrushchev thaw, and its first part was originally announced for publication in *Novy mir* in 1966. The action takes place in the crucial year of 1934, which saw both the Seventeenth Party Congress (known as the "congress of victors", following the "victories" of the first Five Year Plan and the collectivization of agriculture) and the mysterious murder of Kirov, first secretary of the Leningrad party organization.

At the time of his greatest triumphs Stalin feels he is faced with two main threats. The first is the rise of the technocrats, of whom an egregious example is Sasha's uncle Ryazanov, head of the huge new steel works in Magnitogorsk, who runs "his" town like a nineteenth-century American magnate. (This is almost certainly a fictional portrait of Zavenyagin, the steel boss whom Granin shows rescuing Timofeev-Resovskii from labour camp.) When a party commission comes down to find out why Ryazanov has built an unauthorized sports complex for his employees, he imprisons its members in a splendid out-of-town mansion without telephone or transport, gorging them on choice food and wines till the time comes for their departure. Such high-handedness may spring from the spirit which gets blast-furnaces built in record time, but Stalin cannot tolerate it.

The other threat which Stalin imagines is that of his long-standing colleagues, Lenin's comrades during the revolution. They are the brilliant intellectuals whom he once served as a menial secretary. Quite apart from the fact that

This murder, which furnished the immediate pretext for Stalin's purges, is the focal event of the novel, though it takes place only at the very end, and then as it were off stage.

The novel has two epicentres: the Kremlin itself and the Arbat, the latter a lively, diverse but elegant quarter of old Moscow undergoing its first real changes since the revolution with Soviet-made cars beginning to overtake the familiar horse-drawn cabs, and road-works signalling the construction of the underground railway. Here lives a society being churned up and transformed by the new régime, yet still in some ways recognizable from pre-revolutionary days. A family firm of high-class tailors, the Sharoks, still provides impeccable service for chosen customers, but their son Yura, aware that there is no future for him in the new society, is making a career for himself in the security police. The "new class" is being born, formed out of remnants of the old one recast in the party's image, combined with raw but ruthless recruits from the working class and peasantry.

From this milieu come both the persecutors and the persecuted. Sasha Pankratov, student at the Moscow Transport Institute, who lives in the same block as Yura Sharok, is expelled by his party organization for asking penetrating questions in class and for publishing a wall newspaper deemed too irreverent for the anniversary of the October Revolution. Reinstated by the All-Union Party Control Commission, he is nevertheless arrested by a body which is becoming more authoritative even than the party, the NKVD. In exile in Siberia, he discovers a whole new – or old – world whose existence he had never suspected: the despised and rejected, the exiled "kulaks", the Anarchists and Socialist Revolutionaries who have held staunchly to their beliefs. He also finds out a great deal about himself: that unbending will-power does not solve all problems, that he needs to learn from the simple peasants flexibility, patience and stoicism.

This story of the *education sentimentale* of an aspiring member of the new élite will be largely unfamiliar to the Soviet reader, though in the West the memoirs of Lev Kopelev and others have provided similar insights. Inevitably, the greatest interest will attach to Rybakov's portrait of Stalin, who is seen premeditating what were to become the bloodiest deeds of his career.

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## Eavesdropping on an era

Julian Graffy

My Friend Ivan Lapshin  
Metro Cinema

The Soviet Director, Aleksei German, has made only three films in the course of the past seven years, and each of them has had to battle its way to the screen. *Roadcheck* (1971), based on the story "Operation 'Happy New Year'" by his father Yuri German, is a Second World War film that treats with sympathy and understanding a deserter who returns to fight on the Soviet side. It was banned until 1986. *Twenty Days without War* (1976), from a story by Konstantin Simonov, portrays evacuees in Tashkent so frankly and unheroically that the official State Cinema body Goskino called it "the shame of Leningrad studios". Its release was held up for a year. *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* (1984), also based on stories by his father, is German's stylistically boldest and most ambitious film. It too was initially suppressed, but it was released in 1986 and shown on Soviet television, where it caused a sensation. Suddenly German is being widely written about and highly praised, undergoing the bizarre experience of bursting fully fledged upon audiences in his own country.

Set in 1935, *My Friend Ivan Lapshin* tells the story of "our local Pinkerton", the head of the police investigation department in a provincial town. The story is told in retrospect by an old man who had lived as a boy in the same communal flat as Lapshin. The film captures the naive joyfulness and youthful energy of a period when the heroism of the Revolution and

the civil war was still a vivid memory. At Lapshin's fortieth birthday party there is drinking, telling of tales, singing to the guitar. A group of actors rehearse their play about the new times. Everywhere there are brass bands, "one for every inhabitant of the town". Yet at the edge of the jollity there is desolation: stolen firewood is sold from a cart, Lapshin dreams of a plane crash, an old woman is threatened with the prison island of Solovki, frozen corpses are removed from an underground corridor, the play turns out to be about the "re-education" of forced labourers on the White Sea canal.

*My Friend Ivan Lapshin* uncovers the 1930s with great density and originality. History is conveyed through lived lives. Small-town existence is revealed to be the alternation of gaiety, tedium and outbursts of hysteria. German's film is shot (in present-day Astrakhan) by his brilliant cameraman, Valery Fedosov, in a combination of colour and variously tinted black-and-white. For most of the film the screen is drained of colour. There is no music on the soundtrack apart from the playing of the brass bands. The viewer becomes a troubled eavesdropper on an era, like the boy, our co-conspirator, whose quizzical face is suddenly glimpsed in a doorway or peering out from behind an adult's waist. In a stunning long sequence late in the film, Lapshin captures the gang of the notorious killer, Solov'ov, in a hidden room in a communal house on the bleak outskirts. Women shriek, babies cry, the camera rushes headlong down long corridors to the sound of urgent footsteps.

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they know about Lenin's testament (which was decidedly unflattering to Stalin and recommended his removal as party first secretary), they have, in Stalin's view, no idea of the requisites of political leadership. As a Georgian, Stalin despises the Russian people, but admires the Russian State tradition, the monolithic authority exercised by the tsars, and disdains the fissiparous word-mongering of his associates. "The Russian people loved Ivan the Terrible and Peter the First," he reflects, "that is, precisely the tsars who destroyed the boyars and nobles . . . Hereditary power does not affect the essence of the matter: in order to rise to the status of leader, a monarch must destroy those around him who are used to regarding him as a puppet."

He suspects, moreover, that his colleagues, survivors of the various oppositions of the 1920s, are trying to embroil him in an unnecessary conflict with Nazi Germany. He considers that the real enemies of the Soviet Union remain Britain, France and the United States. He even feels a certain admiration for the ruthlessness exhibited by Hitler in the Roehm Putsch: there at least is a leader who knows how to lead.

These suspicions coalesce and focus on the person of Kirov, who has conspicuously failed to root out the Trotskyists and Zinovievites lurking in his Leningrad party organization, and therefore in Stalin's view must be in their pocket. Besides, Kirov descends to seeking cheap popularity among Leningraders by living in an ordinary apartment and playing grandmother's footsteps with their children on the streets. "By flaunting his accessibility and his simple life style, Kirov was challenging him, drawing attention to the fact that he lived under guard in the Kremlin and didn't play grandmother's footsteps with children, that is, that Stalin feared the people but Kirov did not."

Until recently most Western historians felt it was probable that Stalin had brought about Kirov's murder, with the aim both of eliminating a rival and of providing a pretext for his intended purges. Recently a few, such as Adam Ulam and Arch Getty (for quite different reasons), have disputed this consensus. Rybakov evidently accepts the more traditional interpretation. True, in the novel we do not witness the actual murder, but we see Stalin transferring specially trusted NKVD operatives to Leningrad, where they dig out a former party member, Leonid Nikolaev, who has been sending frantic letters to Kirov, warning him of the Trotskyists in his entourage, and threatening to do something about them himself. Nikolaev was the man who actually shot Kirov on December 1, 1934.

Rybakov's novel is the most detailed account which has ever appeared in the Soviet Union of the background to Stalin's purges. It far outdoes the timid lifting of the curtain which Khrushchev permitted himself in his "secret speech" of 1956 (which was in any case only published abroad). At the same time, it is in many ways a thoroughly orthodox work. It implies that the Five Year Plans, though marred by "excesses", were fundamentally sound in conception. In that respect, it is more orthodox than, say, Shmelyov or Mozhaev. It refrains from any suggestion that the oppositionists of the 1920s, from Trotsky to Bukharin, might have had a valid case to argue. It emphatically places Lenin on a pedestal, eschewing any hint that he might have bequeathed to Stalin the institutions which enabled the latter to carry out his purges unimpeded.

These limitations point to an important feature of the current policy of *glasnost*: All the novels and articles I have mentioned proceed explicitly or implicitly from the assumption that Stalin and a few of his associates were personally responsible for the tragedy of the 1930s. Nowhere is the possibility considered that there were institutional causes with earlier roots. Lenin is seen, not as Stalin's inspirer and mentor, but as a yardstick of political sagacity and probity against which to measure his successor. In particular, Lenin's New Economic Policy, which up to a point encouraged private agriculture and trade, is now being interpreted as the most acceptable model for the further development of the socialist economy. As Shmelyov writes, "Unless we recognize that the abandonment of Lenin's New Economic Policy catastrophically dislocated the building

of socialism in the USSR, then we shall condemn ourselves, as in 1953 and 1965, to half-measures."

This, then, is the new orthodoxy. *Glasnost* does not yet mean the unfettered re-examination of the past, but its reinterpretation for the needs of the present in the light of the mixed economy of NEP. But NEP was itself a compromise, reluctantly accepted by most party activists in 1921 as a painful necessity, and initially belittled by Lenin as a mere breathing space. Lenin himself had in fact, as Shmelyov interestingly admits, "come to believe that Command methods were the basis of a socialist economy". Furthermore, NEP did not entail any degree of political freedom or pluralism. Only one party was permitted, and this feature is not up for discussion, even though Gorbachev has privately pointed out that the absence of an opposition makes it more difficult to bring new ideas into currency and to shake up outmoded attitudes.

So there is still some way to go before we can feel that *glasnost* is tackling the root problems of Soviet society. All the same, considerable progress has been made. The fragmentary insights into the recent past thrown up by the

Khrushchev thaw are being consolidated and extended. Indeed, the recently published novels tell us far more about Stalinist society than anything which appeared then, with the possible exception of Solzhenitsyn's *Ivan Denisovich*. What we have before us now are not precarious impressions snatched from a forbidden world and couched in coy euphemisms. These novels have been written by authors who have collected their material and pondered it for decades, and who asserted even in sterner times the right occasionally to call a spade a spade. On the evidence they lay before us here, the Soviet Union is closer than it has ever been to exorcising the dead weight of the past and to facing the future unencumbered by it.

Boris Mozhaev: *Muzhiki i baby* (Don, 1987, nos 1-3).  
Sergei Antonov: *Vas'ka* (Yunus, 1987, nos 4-5).  
Vladimir Dudintsev: *Belye odeschye* (Neva, 1987, nos 1-4).  
Danil Granin: *Zubir* (Novyi mir, 1987, nos 1-2).  
Anatoli Pristavkin: *I nochnevala nuchka zolotyia* (Znamya, 1987, nos 3-4).  
Yurii Trifonov: *Ischiznovenie* (Druzhba narodov, 1987, no 1).  
Anatoli Rybakov: *Deti Arbata* (Druzhba narodov, 1987, nos 4-6).

## Formed under Stalin

Václav Písecký

KAREL HVIŽDALA (Editor)  
Generace 35-45  
350pp. Munich: Karel Jadrný.  
3922810 136

*Generace 35-45* is an anthology of the work of eighteen Czech authors born between the mid-1930s and 40s. Some have been living in the West since the Soviet invasion of 1968; others left Czechoslovakia in the 1970s after serving prison sentences for their work; five of those represented still live there.

What defines the members of "Generace 35-45" as a group is their common, formative experience of the Stalinist régime of the 1950s in Czechoslovakia. Theirs was the first generation of Czechs to grow up in a realized Utopia. In spite of all the care then lavished on them by the State, they tend to look back on their youth with bitterness and resentment. Seeking to avoid the attentions of the State, they devoted all their energies to a search for the few surviving traces of pre-communist Czechoslovakia. When in the 1960s they were eventually able to publish their own work—mostly in the alternative literary monthly *Tyžd* (The Face)—the common denominator turned out to be a fiercely anti-ideological stance.

One of the most articulate young writers associated with *Tyžd* was Jiří Grša. The anthology includes a long interview with Grša, who now lives in West Germany after having served some time in prison in Czechoslovakia for his novel *Dotazník* (The Questionnaire, reviewed in the TLS of October 1, 1982). He took issue with Marx's statement that philosophers had been explaining the world whereas what was necessary was to change it. On the contrary, said Grša: what matters is not to change the world, but to experience it and to try to understand it—this is the only way an individual may undergo a transformation, leading possibly to the transformation of the world as a whole.

Markéta Brousek takes up the argument of some Western sociologists that a tendency towards simplified ideological thinking is characteristic of the younger generation in Western industrialized societies. If this is the case, says Brousek, then the first Czech post-war generation was no longer part of the Western world. Rather, enthusiastic young communists, who after 1948 set out to build a new, ideal, revolutionary society, was, paradoxically, the last Western European generation in Czechoslovakia—the last generation still capable of being filled with enthusiasm for a utopian ideological scheme. Subsequent generations have been pervaded by a deep scepticism, not necessarily only when writing about their native country. Jaroslav Vejvoda here examines life in the most affluent and most bureaucratic of Western European societies, Switzerland, where he lives. He finds much that is shocking, at least for those who are devoted to the principles of socialism.

citizenship. In an excerpt from his novel *Zelud vlna* (Young Wine; 1986) he contrasts the incompatible reactions of three generations of a single Czech family: the grandmother who comes to visit her relatives in Switzerland, her son and daughter-in-law, who, since defecting after the invasion of 1968, have been living timidly in Switzerland as second-class "non-citizens", and their bourgeois, left-wing teenage son, who in spite of his vague awareness of his Czech origins regards himself as a native Swiss with a typically Swiss view of the world.

Sylvie Richterová has also chosen the revolt against a collectivized identity as the point of departure for her work, and is one of those who have managed to distil a positive lesson from her experience of life in Czechoslovakia in the 1950s. She realizes that there is no need to fear life outside institutionalized social structures when one is excluded from social institutions. Richterová sees her experience of Stalinist Czechoslovakia as crucial to an understanding of the deepest roots of her personality. In tight, intensely poetic passages, chosen from her as yet unpublished work "Slabikář otocového jazyka" (ABC of the Mother Tongue), she takes a journey back to the archetypal experiences of earliest childhood, shedding light on some of the most profound aspects of our individual existence.

Another author who has made positive use of his Czechoslovak experience is Václav Bělohorský. Bělohorský subscribes to an anti-ideological philosophy, which has met with a lively response in Prague dissident circles. In his view there exist certain basic truths, especially moral truths. They are a part of the natural order of the world, which is necessary to accept and respect. If we put ourselves above this natural order and negate it, by subjecting it to an ideological system, catastrophe follows. By their concerted effort to subject reality to ideology, the Czechoslovak communists have not only managed to devastate the nation's moral and cultural consciousness, but also to cause a major ecological crisis. Bělohorský shows that it was the Central European writers at the beginning of this century who were the first to understand the hidden dangers in the attempts to eliminate natural reality from our lives as "unscientific" and to subject them to an objectivistic and impersonal rational system. The old Austrian Empire, which, as a supranational State, was based on the impersonality principle, became for them a metaphorical warning against the spectre of European labouring under a bureaucratic, ideological yoke.

*Generace 35-45* is a disturbing testimony to the ideological devastation of contemporary Czechoslovak literary life. The signs of oppression are most conspicuous in the work of those writers who still live in Czechoslovakia. Plainly the émigré writers have been able to assess the traumatic experience of life in their native country from a relatively relaxed and detached standpoint.

## Technosophical tales

Michael Hofmann

BOTH STRAUSS  
*Niemand anderes*  
220pp. Munich: Hanser. DM29.80.  
3446 14890 6  
PETER HANDKE  
*Die Abwesenheit*  
225pp. Frankfurt: Suhrkamp. DM25.  
3518 04428 1  
*Nachmittag eines Schriftstellers*  
91pp. Salzburg: Residenz. DM24.  
37017 0489 9

Both Strauss's two publications directly prior to *Niemand anderes* (None Other, or Nobody Else) were a book-length poem and a play (*The Tourist Guide*, reviewed in the TLS, April 24). One has to go back a little further to find a model or analogue for the new book: to his 1981 volume, *Paare, Passanten* (Couples, Passers-by), a "mosaic" of short prose observations and reflections. Even so, it is in the end the differences between them that are more striking and substantial: as his pursuit of various forms shows, Strauss is a restless, dissatisfied author, not much given to repeating himself.

*Paare, Passanten* had the impact of a writer—even one who had already succeeded elsewhere—finding his personal form. Strauss threw on the licence to be discontinuous, on the freedom from writing a novel. Loosely grouped under six different headings, his notes or paragraphs or entries were both immediate and considered. They strayed and cohered. Nor did Strauss merely run sagacious rings round his subjects. Indeed, many of his passages began with the simple and humble declaration of just what these subjects were: "M's visit", "Tuesday at the Rest", "The young judge", "The Mister Minit in the Munich department store", "The film *Tree of Wooden Clogs*". The writing that followed was impressive in its graceful accumulation of detail, in its feeling for bizarre and distal (of the flawless, laminated surface of German public life); in the sheer weight of Strauss's formulations—this last, the hallmark of his style. *Paare, Passanten* aligned Strauss (albeit in a different sense) with those existences he had labelled as *Gegenwartswarren*, or "Now Freaks".

Even so, this produced restlessness and dissatisfaction in Strauss. One note, in "Schrieb" (Script), decries the excess of information and particularizing description: "I just feel like saying 'a house'. It bothers me to have say 'a half-timbered mansion', or 'a clinker building' or 'pebbledashed like a crumb cake', etc." Instead, "Das Grobe und das Gleiche sind das Interessante; das Wirkliche das Wenige" ("Roughness and resemblance are what is interesting; reality is spare"). Strauss's antipathy extended from the fruits of observation to the activity as a whole. A long interview with him in *Die Zeit* earlier this year bore the title—also drawn from *Paare, Passanten*—"Writing is a Séance". He looked like a man set on overturning his reputation, even if it meant losing his readership. This was no longer Strauss the commentator on contemporary phenomena, but a man communing with ancient and esoteric authors (Francesco Colonna, Cäsarius von Heisterbach), and so obsessively devoted to writing that he would not even read in the daytime, never mind take a look out of the window. *Niemand anderes* approvingly cites an Ancient Egyptian authority to this effect: "Write by day with your hands and read by night; make the papyrus scroll and the writing tablet your brothers." And the possible consequence? "The one who understands these texts is the author himself."

Does Strauss's exclusive title then fully mean what it says? Nobody else? Mercifully, not quite. *Niemand anderes* is, though, for all its superficial resemblances to *Paare, Passanten*, a completely different animal. Individual passages are longer and more elaborated; distinctions between fictionalized substance and generalizing abstractions open up; the whole is far less liberally and accommodatingly structured. It is a less likeable book, riven and formidable. On the one hand, there are the ideas, pieces, where Strauss is perhaps now most himself, in which he calls for a new intelligence, at once technical and metaphysical; for "Tech-

nosophie"; for the mind of man to leave its nineteenth-century nature fog, and grasp and respond to scientific change; for "the anthropomorphic forge" to get working with "the subatomic whirrings" of modern physics. In an age where religion has been abandoned, and science distrusted, may not both be restored together?

One should draw a connection between Swedenborg's sentence "The more angels there are, the more space", and the question of the particle physicists whether we are not surrounded by ten times our own mass in invisible neutrinos. The beautiful thought that angels never take up space, but always create more of it, seems to be reflected in the hypothesis that the invisible may contain far more matter than the solid world.

If the ethical, theoretical, intellectual aspect of Strauss has withdrawn to its own fastness ("Odeon" is the name given to his science-religion argument), then so has the vestigial observer, story-teller and fictionalist, the man still plagued—or blessed—with detail. (The thinker about writing, autobiography and intimate journals lives somewhere else again: in "Die Tage".) The writing about people has taken on a slightly rarefied, abstract, theatrical atmosphere. No longer "Mister Minit" and "M's visit", but "Girl with Tortoiseshell Comb", "Her Wedding Letter", "Woman with

Telephone", "Man with Empty Chair"—unnaming titles, titles for bleak genre paintings, narrative paintings, slightly hysterical commonplace tropes. These pieces are (for Strauss) surprisingly like conventional short stories, guilty epiphanies or fully toggled out in plot and character. In either case, they are planned exhibits, not the chance flashes of *Paare, Passanten*: the tale of the music publisher, out of a job, who marries a young wife; the evening of the clumsy, unconfident girl with her beau the radio reporter; "characters" like the braggart, or the enthusiast. These are theatrical—scenic, noisy, declarative—not only in their framing, but in the way they are written, a kind of "method" writing. They offer the internal, ventriloquial approach, a rhetorical improvisation by an actor on a given predicament ("Her Wedding Letter"), or the external one, where Strauss (the former Berlin dramaturge) gives a run-down on the background and stations of a character's development.

Strauss, it seems, wanted *Niemand anderes* to be a more organized, better-directed book than *Paare, Passanten*. In fact, though, his various preoccupations have become disentangled from one another and lie oddly and visibly apart. Strauss's gifts are for thought, self-reflection and presentation, and one can see that he may find it difficult to choose from

among them. For my part, there is no one I would rather read on shoes, on hair, on clothes, on gestures: the anthropologist and the man of the theatre still have it over the philosopher and the obsessive.

At a far lower voltage are two new books from Peter Handke. *Die Abwesenheit* (Absence), classed as *ein Märchen*, is almost entirely successful, the "story" *Nachmittag eines Schriftstellers* (Afternoon of a Writer) almost anything but. *Die Abwesenheit* is a strange kind of book, bleached, drained, bled, but rich enough in the areas where it still makes a showing, where it permits itself to exist. It is the story of four protagonists, the old man, the woman, the gambler and the soldier, travelling in the countryside around some large city. The time is an unspecified modernity, the place possibly Europe, but certainly subject to enormous variations of scenery. The book lives in its descriptions of landscape and weather, and in the entirely artificial atmosphere that envelops its soliloquizing characters; beyond that there is a modern preoccupation with inscriptions, with the reading and writing of signs; and there are certain very slight alterations that are made now and again, perhaps with the juniper trees and the white pebbles, (to justify the name *Märchen*: one morning it is summer; an aeroplane sounds as though it is flying in one place;

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Marked at the University of Chicago Press



# Rebel among dwarfs

J. J. White

PETER HÄRTLING  
*Wailingers Augen*  
 205pp. Darmstadt: Luchterhand. DM26.  
 3-472-86657-8

the disappearance of the singer's voice from a music tape signifies to the group the disappearance of their leader, the old man. To the semi-otician, *Die Abwesenheit* is probably a trope: to the common reader, it is a very carefully and gently written book, peculiarly magnetic and almost entirely without substance. It is about "the power of places", and is a kind of relaxed migration from history or story (the same word *Geschichte* in German) into geography.

*Nachmittag eines Schriftstellers* reminds one that Handke can also be one of the most irritating writers alive. A large part of the irritation stems from the fact that he has pitched his account of finishing a day's work, going for a walk and a couple of drinks, and remembering that he has to see his translator, into the third person. The mixture of ungainliness, disingenuousness and pretentiousness that results is typically Handkean. What is after all his own story is presented with a deadly lack of specificity, generosity or humanity. Even his poor cat becomes "das namenlose Haustier" ("the nameless domestic animal"). The nameless *Schriftsteller*, meanwhile, has a go at couples, newspapers, culture and literature in schools. He goes to the edge of town, "because it corresponded to what he had been doing at his desk in the daytime". Peter Handke, take a walk.

*Essays in Honour of Elias Canetti* (translated by Michael Hulse. 322pp. André Deutsch. £19.95. 0233 98128 4), published to coincide with Canetti's eightieth birthday, looks at both the man and his work. There are essays by Susan Sontag, on Canetti's preoccupation with "being someone he can admire", and by John Bayley, on Canetti's literary personality; Manfred Schneider writes about the mythic and symbolic elements of the grotesque and the deformed in the writer's work; and Alfred Huddick contributes a piece on Canetti's "obsession with the fleshiness of the flesh, with being devoured and reconstituted".

Wilhelm Waiblinger, the hero of Peter Härtling's new novel, is likely to be as little known to German readers as he is in this country. An early nineteenth-century minor Swabian poet, listed by the Tübingen literati of the novel as the precocious author of the now justly forgotten *Phäton*, he has more vague plans and abandoned projects than actual works to his credit, and he spends more time playing the part of *poète maudit* than actually producing anything of substance. Härtling's Waiblinger, a kind of Swabian James Dean (someone at one point calls him a "delinquent"), displays a neurotic restlessness and ostentatious non-conformity that are eventually to be his undoing. If he had lived half a century earlier, he would no doubt have been the very model of a modern Storm-and-Stress *Genie*; but as it is, his latter-day brand of Romantic self-preoccupation, emotional intensity and Byronic hellenism is very much at odds with the parochial spirit of the Tübingen of the 1820s and even of his place of study: the Stift, that famous seminary that had once numbered Hölderlin, Hegel and Schelling amongst its pupils. "I live among dwarfs, among shopkeepers", Waiblinger complains, but "I want to be like Shakespeare" – or Empedocles, or Hölderlin, or Mozart's Don Giovanni, or Goethe's Wilhelm Meister, as other parts of his story reveal.

An effusive Romantic who can utter such lines as "I must love, worship, lose and find myself again" and "I want to understand love, its and our infinity" is likely to prove something of an embarrassment to the modern reader. And, it must be added, he has little to do with the real, historical Waiblinger, to whom Härt-



Detail from Ruth Thorne-Thomsen's "Untitled, Chicago", a toned gelatin-silver print reproduced from Andy Grundberg and Kathleen McCarthy Gauss's Photography and Art: Interactions since 1946 (271pp. Abbeville, distributed by Pandemic. £29.95. 089659 683 4).

ling was first attracted some forty years ago. For that Waiblinger was not the poet, but the author of *Friedrich Hölderlin's Leben, Dichtung und Wahn*, the first biographical account of Hölderlin's life, and a meticulously observed attempt at understanding his later years of insanity. But the Waiblinger who sat in Rome in the late 1820s setting down his impressions of the mad poet in his tower in Tübingen, arguably as powerful a work as any of Waiblinger's fictions and certainly one of the germs of Härtling's own Hölderlin novel of 1976, is not the subject of *Wailingers Augen*. For here Härtling goes back to the Tübingen student days: to a Waiblinger entangled in an impossible love with the Jewish Julie Michaelis (his "Diotima"), just as Susette Gontard was Hölderlin's, engaging in continual skirmishes with both Swabian society at large and his friends in particular, and gradually losing his grip on reality in a way that makes Hölderlin's circumstances seem like a prefiguration of his own fate. Yet for all Waiblinger's uncompromising self-concern, his edging towards paranoia and his apparent death-wish, Härtling on the whole manages to depict the poet in a way which avoids sentimentalizing him and succeeds in doing for Waiblinger what he himself had done for Hölderlin.

Two features in particular help to offset

Waiblinger's potentially maudlin self-indulgence. First, there is the constant juxtaposition of Waiblinger's circumstances with those of the Michaelis family. As assimilated Jews the latter are anxious to keep a low social profile. The intrusion of a rebel like Waiblinger into their lives is as problematic for them as it is for the Stift authorities. The novel's dominant conflict, between order and rebellion, between the claims of individual and community, becomes far more even-handed and achieves more historical resonance because of this dimension. The other main counterbalance to the hero's self-centredness is indicated in the title's reference to Waiblinger's eyes. For Waiblinger's perspective is anything but simple. He has a schizoid habit of standing outside himself and seeing things from a separate vantage-point. The text mimics this by interpolating a series of brief chapters viewing the Waiblinger-Michaelis love from the perspective of a young child, in many ways the double of both Julie and Wilhelm. And through various other refractions – allowing, for example, various aspects of the world of the 1980s to shine through the texture of what portends to be a historical novel – Härtling succeeds in creating, not just a portrait of a rebel without a cause, but a picture of a world which has much in common with our own.

## Mocking superiority

Michael Butler

HUGO LOETSCHER  
*Die Paplere des Immunen*  
 505pp. Zürich: Diogenes. Sw fr 35.  
 25701693 X

Over ten years ago the publication of *Der Immune* (reissued in a slightly revised form in 1985) caused considerable controversy in Hugo Loetscher's native Switzerland, not primarily for its original structure – a complex amalgam of story, travel diary, satirical essay and political comment – but because the novel took a sharp look at some of the principal pretensions and taboos of Swiss cultural and social life.

The central anonymous character, sensitive and vulnerable, uses his gift for narration and observation to "immunize" himself from the brutality and corruption he witnesses around him, whether in Zürich, Paris or South America. Loetscher's aim was to create a flexible fictional device which would enable him as a contemporary intellectual to stand back from the horrors and hypocrisies of bourgeois society in the second half of the twentieth century.

At the end of the book, in a passage with Kafkaesque undertones, two glum detectives arrive to arrest the hero. After a fruitless search of his apartment they characteristically overlook a bundle of harmless-looking papers. These turn out to be the only tangible evidence of the "Immune's" existence. Loetscher now presents these "documents" as a sequel to his earlier novel.

*Die Paplere des Immunen* is not a straightforward continuation of the earlier work, despite its similar episodic structure. Loetscher appears, indeed, to have lost sympathy for his quirky creation. Together, the autobiographical features have gone, and whereas the earlier (as) displayed imaginative freedom and originality, this one is more cluttered and more

pessimistic.

The novel is essentially a series of dialectical exchanges between the author and a shadowy and untrustworthy alter ego. The Immune's confessions prove as inventive as ever, but they are interwoven with critical comment and analysis aimed at exposing the weaknesses of his stance of intellectual impassivity and mocking superiority. Far from being released from the debilitating effects of everyday constraints via his aesthetic cartwheels, the would-be Immune finds himself imprisoned in the "worst place in the world": the brain of his inventor. His richly imaginative forays serve only as a fitful mechanism for self-immunization from the painful ambiguities of human commitment.

Loetscher's comic skill, however, enables the Immune to lead his creator a merry dance, to dance before he is forced to submit to the drabness of contemporary reality. He moves through time and cultures, from an account of a seventeenth-century peasant revolt in Lucerne (with contemporary overtones) to a hilarious episode about a modern Don Quixote who sets out to destroy history by burning down Madame Tussaud's. Elsewhere, a brilliant dissection of the undifferentiated language and images of television is complemented by a satirical piece offering advice on how to become a successful (i.e. complaisant) intellectual.

Yet the book concludes by challenging its own premises: the role of such fictions in modern society. Whereas earlier Loetscher appeared to value the apparent freedom of the writer as Court Jester, his new book is characterized by a wary scepticism about the social and political effectiveness of such intellectual detachment. At one point the Immune declares: "We are born, but we do not come into the world." Fiction, Loetscher seems to be saying, may well be an entertaining method of locating ourselves in a confusing, labyrinthine world, but it can offer us no convincing programme for changing it or, ultimately, for leading more creative lives within it.

## Rough and rustic

Masolino d'Amico

RAFFAELE NIGRO  
*I fuochi del Basento*  
 242pp. Rome: Camunia. L26,000.

The Premio Campiello remains Italy's most coveted literary prize. This is partly because of its mechanism, which keeps it in the public eye over several months. In late spring, fifteen or twenty new novels are proposed to a small committee of literati. Then, during a series of open discussions the candidates are reduced to five, which are put before a much larger, "popular" jury which chooses the winner – by a ballot that is broadcast live from Venice, in September. Members of the second jury change every year, and they include notables, sportsmen and film-stars; they are, though, in the main, professional men and society women; not easily influenced, it is hoped, by publishers, who control and manage to manipulate most of the other major literary prizes. The only drawback to this theory of impartiality was that the majority of them used to live in the Veneto, and were not above chauvinism; writers with a Venetian background tradi-

tionally had an advantage over their *confrères*.

But for the first time this year, voters were drafted from all over Italy; and, significantly, the prize for 1987 went to an unknown writer from the South: Raffaele Nigro, who was born in Melfi forty years ago, and had earlier attracted some attention with an essay on the literature of his home region, Basilicata. Basilicata is also the setting for *I fuochi del Basento*, his first novel, which the blurb compares to the masterpieces of "Southern" writing by De Roberto and Lampedusa, Alianello and Jovine, Carlo Levi and Casigliano, Tommaso Fiore and Scotellaro. (Critics did not disagree with this, but many of them pointed out another obvious influence in Gabriel García Márquez, whose Macondo has the same part-historical, part-hallucinatory quality of the territory passed by Nigro's River Basento.)

In 107 compact chapters Nigro illustrates the unfamiliar, unfashionable history of a vast section of the Italian South in the period between 1784 and 1861 – the year of the so-called unification. His main theme is the condition of the peasants, which comes over as one of abject and intolerable misery, despite the richly evoked flavour of their "culture". Through an apparently endless series of

clashes with whoever is in power, they vainly try to lay claim to the land they have been working since the beginnings of time.

The saga describes a series of semi-legendary, almost mythical, events connected with the Nigro family. The progenitor, Francesco Nigro, is an illiterate rustic with a gift for rhyme: all his life he tries, unsuccessfully, to learn how to write down the doggerel that effortlessly flows from his mouth. Early in the book, he helps a friend to burn down a rich man's house, so becoming an outlaw and joining the gang of a notorious bandit. Rapes and murders follow; Francesco is initially disgusted, but then, incensed by the sight of soldiers butchering labourers, he leads his companions to the rescue. Soon he becomes the self-appointed general of a sort of peasant army, the friend of enlightened intellectuals; but then he vanishes during a battle against regular troops. His children, who have barely seen him, lead hardly less remarkable lives. One, Carlantonio, becomes in his turn an outlaw and chief bandit after raping his mother-in-law's sister. Another, Raffaele Arcangelo, becomes a worker of miracles and the founder of a haven for outcasts. They all die violent, seemingly pointless, deaths. The women are mostly of secondary importance: Concetta Libera, Francesco's patient, strong wife; Por-

zia Maria della Neve, the victim of Carlantonio's violence, who in due course accepts him as the father of her child; and Carlantonio's sisters, the tragic Teresa Addolorata and Maria Sofronia, who is eventually happy in her love affair.

Against the classic southern background of ancient towns and villages with names like Acerenza, Calcianno, Conza, Calitri, Teora, Melfi, Trivigno, Venora – all real towns and villages, seldom visited to this day – a nameless, truly barbaric brutality fills page after page. Each moment is brief but reproduces itself over and over again. Women are violated and killed, heads are chopped off and heaped up in crates, prisoners hang by their feet to dry in the sun, every house is looted, everything is destroyed but nothing ever changes. Despite the succinctness and the vivacity of the single episodes, the situations repeat themselves and are bound, at times, to induce boredom. On the other hand, they do convey what the author is after, that is, a sense of folk-lore, as if one were hearing, rather than reading, a narration. Reiteration is certainly an important part of the oral tradition. And as Nigro himself says: "All these stories with the high-sounding names, the genealogies, grandpa Pasquale would tell in the evenings. And everybody would be hanging on his lips."

## Ravenna rococo

Ian Thomson

ALDO BUSI  
*La delina bizantina*  
 400pp. Milan: Mondadori. L22,000.  
 8804 29878 2

To judge by the dust-jacket of *La delina bizantina* (The Byzantine Dolphin), Aldo Busi is being promoted as an Italian writer without precedent – almost *sui generis*. Certainly, the linguistic pyrotechnics and typographical eccentricities which pepper the pages of his devilishly complicated (and lumberingly protracted) novel have the appearance of something new – new, that is, in the sluggish backwaters of a literature now deprived of its most "innovative" writer, the late Italo Calvino.

But the artful interstitching of numerous plots and subplots, the convoluted metaphors and witty neologisms, of *La delina bizantina* surely have their precursor in Carlo Emilio Gadda's Joycean novel *Quer pasticciaccio brutto di via Merulana* (1957). Just as Gadda described himself as a *barroconiere di frodo*, a "poacher of the baroque", so Busi affects a rich and rococo language, the cloying complacency of which (with its numerous dialect words, scatalogical puns and half-garbled Hispanisms) is liable to weary the most patient of readers.

Set mainly in Ravenna, the novel concerns a shady organization called the "Sindaco" (Christian Democrat, it would seem) which is promoting Mafia-infiltrated big-business concerns from both America and the Vatican: "L'Alta Finanza", "La Confindustria", "Banca San Petronio", "Comunione Liberazione". There is even mention of Tommaso Buscetta, the penitent *mafioso* currently spilling the beans about his former accomplices to the Sicilian magistracy. So, *La delina bizantina*, though set in an unspecified future, is very much a novel for our times; with considerable gusto, Busi satirizes an apparent *bête noire* of his: male-dominated "power politics". But Busi's male characters are not the only bad eggs. As an approximation of a plot gradually emerges from the welter of polysyllabic words, we learn that a "horde of feminists" is ready to set fire to the Ravenna Palace of Justice. In the midst of this political unrest stand three stalwart, decidedly like-like women, Teodora, Anastasia and Signorina Scontrino ("Miss Receipt") found a new, "feminist" collective, with the Byzantine Dolphin, a luxurious Ravenna camping-site, as their chosen spiritual home.

The ancient Signorina Scontrino, erstwhile lay missionary in the Argentine pampas, is at absurd though pleasingly creepy: creation: given to ingesting cones of incense or snuffing round rubbish cones (apparently in search of spiritual onions buried in the metaphorical debris of civilization), she is the Alma Mater of the Byzantine Dolphin; her Rasputin-like control over Anastasia and her teenage daughter

Teodora (known throughout the novel as *la balena*, or "the whale", owing to her blubbery figure and voracious appetite for sweets) is total. Originally the spiritual alternative to the masculine world of vested interest and underhand *clientelismo*, the Byzantine Dolphin feminist collective (now so massive, it is declared a "national monument"), rapidly becomes a satellite of Busi's hated America: save for the absence of skyscrapers and cactus plants, it in every way resembles Dallas. The commune rapidly goes the way of the Roman Empire in the throes of its decline, with the Italian government itself trafficking in Macedonian and Dalmatian slaves for the benefit of its costly upkeep: Teodora (by now so monstrously adipose, she is described as *gelatinosa*) turns against her mother Anastasia; Anastasia, for whom power and corruption are a positive *seduzione*, turns against Signorina Scontrino, and is then poisoned. Power-struggles, fought out with weapons ranging from sex to money, poison to politics, become the order of the dismal day.

Busi lacks the philosophical depth of Gadda (the deliberate confusions of *Quer pasticciaccio brutto di via Merulana* were there as a result of his close reading of Leibniz), and his obscurities are less amusing than those of the earlier author. But as a compendium of literary forms and styles (gothic, baroque, satire, elegy, mock-philosophical) *La delina bizantina* (which is as florid as its title is presumably meant to suggest) is at times genuinely exhilarating, and one has to admire Busi's virtuosity with the Italian language – turning it inside out, twisting, deforming and generally bashing it over the head. Should it find a translator he will deserve our sympathy.

## Searching for Nobodi

Anna Laura Lepschy

ANTONIO TABUCCHI  
*Il filo dell'orizzonte*  
 107pp. Milan: Feltrinelli. L12,000.  
 8807 01328 2

Antonio Tabucchi, who is also a specialist in Portuguese literature – he has recently edited an Italian collection of Pessoa – belongs to the younger generation of Italian novelists, which includes Aldo Busi, Gianni Celati, Andrea De Carlo, Daniele Del Giudice and Pier Vittorio Tondelli. *Il filo dell'orizzonte* is his sixth work of fiction. Here, as in his first collection of short stories, *Il globo del rovescio* (1975), Tabucchi displays his fascination with what lies behind façades, a reality which is forever hidden behind appearances. All of the stories are written from two separate points of view, and it does not surprise us to find that a more recent story, in the Bompiani *Almanacco*, takes the form of an imaginary telephone conversation between Pessoa and Pirandello. *Il filo dell'orizzonte* is a detective story *alla rovescia* (in reverse), with an investigation that reveals more about the detective than the crime.

The impromptu detective is called Spino, and the author, in a postscript, relates his name to Spinoza, a philosopher who "[held] the horizon line in his eyes". His inner journey in quest of his horizon is the substance of the book. An employee in a mortuary in an unnamed coastal city (which is, or could be, Genoa), Spino

wants to discover the identity of the improbably named Carlo Nobodi, whose corpse has been delivered to him. A city without a name: a victim without an identity; a mistress, Sara, of indefinite age and character; a journalist friend, Corrado, also with an imprecise personality – all contribute to the enigma. Sara is to some extent defined by her dreams of romantic travel, inspired by her favourite early films and the liners docked in the port. But only the unnamed city is fully characterized. It is, as Tabucchi stated in an interview, a mental place ("un luogo dell'anima") rather than a physical one, but in Spino's search for the origins of Carlo Nobodi its different districts come to life: the old, crumbling quarter round the mortuary, with its colony of outsize rats; the streets that climb the hillside behind the city, leading to the modern suburbs with their characteristic decorum.

Above all, a physical reality is given to the stages of Spino's search for Nobodi, whom he has nicknamed "Kid". (Spino is an *aficionado* of films). A ring, an old photograph, a patched jacket lead Spino to a bar, to a retired tailor, to a nightclub, to a cemetery, and all these journeys and their goals are minutely documented. But at the end of the book Spino is no nearer to the discovery of Kid's identity. His quest has brought him only to an empty shed in the port, in the middle of the night, and to the realization that there can be no understanding. This he greets with a closing burst of laughter – a release which can be interpreted, in this equivocal, haunting book, as acceptance, or as a cry of despair *alla rovescia*.

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# Meeting *présence* on the way

Stephen Romer

YVES BONNEFOY  
Ce qui fut sans lumière  
103pp. Paris: Mercure de France. 89 fr.  
27152 14227  
Récits en rêve  
265pp. Paris: Mercure de France. 120 fr.  
27152 1460 X

The appearance of two new books by Yves Bonnefoy, a collection of poems and a volume of prose pieces, further confirms him as the most invigorating poet now active in France. The expression "high seriousness" is especially applicable to Bonnefoy, and it explains the compelling authority both of his poetry and of his poetics. More than anyone else, he has deliberately created and refined a body of work; to understand that work fully, his collections have to be read in order and his critical works studied with care. The rigour of his poetics, their unique combination of high abstraction and urgency, comes from his continuing attempt to situate himself – and by extension, his generation – in relation to his immediate intellectual heritage, chiefly the contrasting poetics of Mallarmé, Rimbaud and Surrealism. He has also spoken out clearly in defence of poetry – as an act of knowledge, an affirmation of being – against the orthodoxies of this profoundly critical age. In his important opening *legon* at the Collège de France he set out to reclaim for poetry what the philosophers of language deny it, its validity as an instrument for truth. What Mallarmé attempted in the face of music's growing dominion, Bonnefoy has attempted in the face of a new threat, "reprendre à la critique son bien".

The central tenets of Bonnefoy's aesthetic seem to have been formed in resistance to a double temptation. On the one side there is the omniscient absolute of Mallarmé, hidden in language itself, a *notion pure*, a constellation glinting in a mirror, and exclusive of the hum-

bler experiences and accidents of life. On the other side, there are the autonomous, authorless texts of the deconstructionists, which Bonnefoy described in his *legon* as senseless, expanding constellations of *signifiants*, where you search in vain for the being that assembled them. The destruction of the "antique visée ontologique" leads in both Mallarmé and current critical theory to the abolition of the "personne qui parle", and much of Bonnefoy's energy has gone into reviving the first-person singular as something more than a function governed in advance by language and the unconscious. In radical opposition to this tendency, he quotes Rimbaud: "Je suis rendu au sol avec un devoir à chercher et la réalité rugueuse à atteindre". Bonnefoy believes that this "réalité rugueuse" exists. He accuses Mallarmé of "excarvation", an expressive coinage by which he means the process whereby all things tend towards the conceptual, the abstract and the lifeless. On similar grounds, Bonnefoy came to reject the surreal object as too artificial a construct, too dependent on fugitive association. In place of these, Bonnefoy proposes what he calls "présence", an original plenitude recovered, the "vrai lieu" which is to be found on this earth, and to be shared by others, "un lieu partagé".

The existence of "présence" is an article of faith for Bonnefoy, but this does not make it any easier to comprehend. From what he has written by way of explanation, and on the evidence of his poetry, it is both immanent and transcendent, lodged in certain words, images and aspects of nature. The poet's task is to free certain key words – *pain* and *vin*, *maison*, *orage*, *pierre* and *terre* would be some of them – from the "conceptual framework" that weakens their original symbolic force. By virtue of their poetic retrieval, it is hoped they will open up a habitable space, like Rilke's *Wellenraum* of the *Duino Elegies*. But Bonnefoy is haunted by an anxiety that "présence" exists in an ideal world only, on the fringes of consciousness. In his aesthetic "autobiography",

*L'Arrière-pays*, reprinted in the new book of prose, *Récits en rêve*, he talks of hesitating at a cross-roads, as if the "vrai lieu" were along the other track (the one he didn't take) and not quite visible. And he is troubled by a mysterious threshold in the paintings of Piero della Francesca or Poussin, which he discerns but cannot pass beyond. Since *Anti-Platon*, his first collection of poems, which resolutely refused an idealist solution, this anxiety has become exacerbated. What is remarkable about the latest collection, *Ce qui fut sans lumière*, is how familiar its "philosophy" seems to be: it is certainly in part Platonic, even Augustinian in its appeal to an (albeit undefined) transcendence, traces of whose original perfection persist on the earth – it is the poet's "tâche terrestre" to reassemble them.

But if his ecstatic readings of a southern landscape recalled in memory, or of a Suffolk landscape painted by Constable, or of the vision of a sparrowhawk hovering with a snake in its beak in which the poet sees "le signe même / Du début, du milieu et de la fin" seem close to the metaphysical preoccupations of a Hopkins, Bonnefoy takes care always to "earth" his poem, to return it to what is recognizably our "habitation". Nevertheless, the preterite of the title, which seems to demand a joyous completion in the amplitude of the present, the epigram from John Donne – "For as well the Pillar of Cloud as that of Fire" – and the frequency with which words of light and illumination recur in *Ce qui fut sans lumière* suggest that the mysterious angel that flits in and out, or the shadow "comme une jeune fille, pleins nus dans l'herbe" which on one occasion accompanies the poet, is "présence" itself. Perception of it, however, Bonnefoy insists, can only be temporary, if not instantaneous. In the opening poem, to the barefoot girl "qui est la terre même", he says "Adieu, nous n'étions pas de même destin, / Tu as à prendre ce chemin, et nous cet autre", thereby acknowledging that his presentiment at the cross-roads was right, but demonstrating now that "présence" can actually be encountered and even accompanied a little of the way. In "L'adieu", "présence" is explicitly a vision of Eden, a paradise since scattered and fragmented. In this new collection, then, Bonnefoy seems eager to enrol himself into the mainstream of Western religious thought, while marking his distance from religious faith. And his intuition of "présence" is perhaps no more or less than the privileged moment, or Eliot's moment "in and out of time".

The attainment of this assurance brings with it an important stylistic change as well. The scrupulous verbal purity which is the hallmark of Bonnefoy's poetry, stripped bare as it is of proper names and allusions, remains intact. But in place of the sparing, lapidary utterance of *Hier régnait désert* or *Pierre écrite*, the new collection carries further the cantabile of *Dans le leurre du seuil*, but loosens it into a mode that

is recognizably the post-Romantic philosophical effusion. On the other hand, while the earlier books attained a grand impersonality of manner, they did so at the risk of becoming airless and remote. Indeed, one of the risks that Bonnefoy has always run in his poetry is of falling into hermeticism. His ceaseless reiteration of key words, in order to free them from their usual "prosaic" existence, can so easily turn into an automatism which would entangle them in a system of his own. The deliberate construction of his books as *ensembles* contributes to this effect: it is the undisputed beauty and power of many individual poems that carry the weight of the whole. The new book is not altogether free of this automatism; the last poem in it, the religious "La tâche d'espérance" ends with Bonnefoy's shorthand for the provisional, "O dormeur des matins, barque d'un autre fleuve"; through over-use, "barque" has become a mere counter. But "présence" is genuinely communicated – and not just talked about – in the perfectly achieved short lyrics such as "Le puits, les ronces", "La rapidité des nuages" and "La foudre".

The prose collection, *Récits en rêve*, which consists of *L'Arrière-pays* and other speculative and creative texts, reveals another, altogether striking side to this writer. Bonnefoy is not only an art historian of scope and discrimination, but a writer of powerful imaginative prose, short narratives often surprisingly close to the fantastic. If we were to detect two tutelary figures behind this book they would be the Yeats of "Dove or Swan" and the afterword to *A Vision*, with its blend of historical generalization and brilliant imagery, and Borges, with his fascination for signs and riddles. What fascinated Yeats about Byzantium, the effacement of the individual in the communal transcendent endeavour, Bonnefoy finds in the painting of Giotto, Masaccio and Piero, but even more in the rustic painters of the Italian villages, what he calls the perfect simplicity of their "conscience profonde"; another hint of "présence", which we have, overlaid by the sophistications of the Renaissance and beyond. It is not just painting that exercises his mind, but places that are sacred to him: Rome, Torcello, Egypt, Mount Aso in Japan with its perfect covering of grass, its fairways of light and shadow. Bonnefoy began his career as a mathematician and philosopher, and the spirit of metaphysical reverie is always present. Especially impressive are the short narratives that make up "Remarques sur la couleur" and "L'Origine de la parole", where rich local effects combine with something rarer – an exciting conceptual ingenuity and a willingness to play with ideas. Nearly always, Bonnefoy leaves us contemplating a limitless metaphysical vista which may be triggered by a childhood memory, a boy catching the light on a pocket mirror in a classroom and making it dance, or some indecipherable marks on ancient walls.

## Little death's-head

Robin Buss

ANDRÉ PIEYRE DE MANDIARGUES  
Tout disparaît: Récit  
183pp. Paris: Gallimard. 80 fr.

André Pieyre de Mandiargues cultivates a type of short erotic novel that contains elements of both sadism and masochism: the story may be told from the man's point of view, but the woman is often a dominant partner, contriving the encounter and laying down the rituals that must govern it. In *Tout disparaît*, the events are compressed into a single afternoon during which Hugo comes across Miriam in the *metro* and is enticed by her into the *futur* where they make love, secretly observed by the mysterious Sarah Sand. What has started on the platform at Odéon, against the background of a poster that announces "tout doit disparaître", dissolves into the "floating world" of an exotic bedroom at an untraceable address, and an intrigue that gives dubious meaning to the advertising slogan: "everything must go".

Protection, in Mandiargues, is inevitable, un-sentimental and lethal. Miriam resembles the death's-head moth that she wears tattooed on her thigh, or a black widow spider: the latter image may be too commonplace for Mandi-

argues, but it suits the game of attraction and destruction that he describes, in prose which seems to become mannered from one story to the next. The inversions and embedded clauses, the literary references, the accumulation of details and delicate analysis of moods, all combine to emphasize that this is play, an essay in a genre that owes something to Sade, and perhaps more to the "decadence" of Pierre Louÿs.

Certainly erotic, since it is concerned almost exclusively with physical love, it is not arousing, and in fact goes out of its way to subliminate the effect of reducing all their parts to the same level of desirability (and unattainability), from Miriam's lips, which she reddens with "un bâtonnet rouge comme le gland d'un sexe de bête", to "le petit gouffre charnel adouci ménagé par la nature" in which Hugo lodges his "grand outil de chair", while the various eruptions, explosions and volcanoes which accompany their intercourse paradoxically resemble the euphemisms of a romantic novelist. In a world where, Hugo says, "toutes choses tourment autour du sexe", explicit description of the penis, in any case, reduces

## Holding on

Ian Hamilton

ANDREW MOTION  
Natural Causes  
66pp. Chatto and Windus. Paperback, £4.95.  
07011 3271 X

Andrew Motion is a lyrical poet who wants to write non-lyric poems: he wants to tell stories, he wants to be chatty and discursive, he wants to move around in the world non-intensely, like a wise grown-up. Or, put it another way, Andrew Motion is a narrative poet who would rather be writing from the heart, whose long poems hunger to be short, whose adult sensibility is useful to him chiefly as a means of making sense out of his half-remembered childhood.

There are indeed two ways of looking at this gifted poet. You can take your choice. Either way, you are left with a body of work which often gets its forcefulness from not quite knowing what sort of work it wants to be. Motion is an anthologist and editor of other people's verse: wondering about "sorts of poetry" or "what comes next?" is how he earns his keep. Maybe he worries too much about these things, or maybe his strength is that he's prepared to test himself in genres other than the ones which come to him most naturally. Certainly, there is a tension in his poetry – call it a tension between personality and practice – and to wish for it to be "resolved" is perhaps to wish for something rather less intriguing than what's already on display.

In Motion's *Dangerous Play*, a selection of his poems from 1974 to 1984, the most powerful piece of writing is in prose: "Skating", a memoir of the poet's childhood. In it Motion tells of his mother's death after a long illness: she lay "more or less comatose" for three years after a riding accident, then gradually recovered her speech "before dying without leaving hospital almost exactly ten years after the accident". Throughout these ten years, Motion's father visited his sick wife "nearly every day, unstinting and saintly in his devotion to her". Motion himself was sixteen when the accident happened: he adored his mother and when he writes of her, alive and well, we like her too. The terrible ten years, and their conclusion, seem to cast a huge shadow over Motion's verse: a sense of the precarious is close to the heart of almost everything he writes, and so too is a regard for loyalty, for holding on. However relaxed he tries to be as an impersonal narrator, however many other voices he assumes – either in dramatic monologues or in the italicized snippets of dialogue he's so keen on – there is nearly always, line by line, an air of treading carefully, a feeling of anticipated loss.

This can make for a faint numbness in the actual language of the poems, even as we admire and understand what's going on. Motion's adjectives (and he does seem to feel a little lost without them) are not exactly the obvious ones, but at the same time they don't run any risks: moss, after all, is furry and the chances are that hedges will be scraggy, and so on. But rather this, perhaps, than to be told that someone's "Sunday paper blows free / its awkward panicking wings / flap on the lawn". All in all, Motion has probably been wise to keep his verbal inventiveness in check.

Treading carefully also comes into what he writes about: it is sometimes his subject – and when it is most evidently so, the impact is not easy to resist. His uncolourful speech seems just the right colour for what is being said. Motion has shown this in, say, the lyric sections of his long story-poem, *Independence*, and in "Anniversaries", a group of short poems addressed directly to his mother: poems of bereavement in which keeping steady, holding on, is both the subject and the method.

Elsewhere in Motion's work there can be an uncomfortable tugging between the teller and the tale, and too often we find the poet trying to redeem a piece from prosiness by jacking up the resonance of its concluding lines. At best, though, the "story-line" in Motion's story-poems does usefully inhibit his tendency to droop. And the stories are usually worth telling, even though their subject-matter can, in Motion's hands, be made to sound compellingly explicit.

they are sometimes stories of Empire and the wars that have been fought in its defence.

In other words, they speak of the sort of Englishness his parents took for granted. Looked at in this way, they too can be read as poems of bereavement: Motion writes of these past epochs with a persuasive intimacy – as if, by imagining himself back into his parents' youth, he has been able to reconnect with what he has lost. None of this, one ought to say, is on the surface, and there is perhaps a presumption in calling it essential. And yet Motion is much interested in ideas about fiction, ideas about what we use it for:

Florrie I sat on a grass-grown crumbling stack of peat with the boy by her side, and as soon as she whispered  
Come on, we've done it before, I made him imagine  
his father garroting the stag, slitting the stomach  
and sliding his hands inside for warmth. He was  
never  
myself, this boy, but I know if I tell you his story  
you'll think we are one and the same: both of us  
hiding  
in fictions which say what we cannot admit to  
ourselves.

There is not much hiding going on in Andrew Motion's latest book, *Natural Causes*, although the verse-story genre is still prominent – most notably with a rumbling, or ambling, memoir of his schooldays that is readable enough but too often makes you wonder why it has to be in verse:

A fool, that was the thing to be,  
a Holy Fool – perhaps for life,  
perhaps for a term, or a week –  
but always living inside the law,  
as long as the law allowed me time  
to please myself with my own devices.

There is also a likeable fantasy about a dancing hippo, in which the oddly endowed beast seems to be presented as a sort of misfit artist-type: "I know it was useless, of course, the dancing. I know. Like everything else we do. But God above! it was beautiful. God! – or something like that." This kind of diverting magazine-poem comes to Motion with more ease, more genuine light-listedness, than in the past, but it still leaves a more than slight sense of "So what...?"

The real strength of *Natural Causes*, though, is in its most directly personal poems. Motion has learned from his narrative excursions how to enrich the short lyric with some inexplicit jolts of drama – as in "Hare Lip", a strange, rather fearsome poem about fear. And throughout the book the sense of anticipated loss is even sharper than before. Motion the bereaved son is now a husband and a father. Having once lost everything, or so it must have seemed, he now – for a second time – has everything to lose. In the title poem, "Natural Causes", and in "Hare Lip" and "Firing Practice", there is a resignation tinged with panic that reminds us of Philip Larkin, but with no attempt at any Larkin-like self-mockery:

soon you will die,  
and not only you but this person  
you love, her children, everyone else;  
... no one prepared you for this –

no matter how early  
you realised nothing connected  
with anything, ever ...

These poems are difficult to quote from because another thing Motion has learned from Larkin is how to handle extremely complex sentences in verse that comes across as ordinary speech. The last five and a half stanzas of "Firing Practice" (from which I've taken the two chunks above) seem modelled on Larkin's cunning use of syntax at the end of "Mr Bleaney": to use that as a model without floundering demands considerable skill.

But then to admit Larkin as an influence at all is to risk, as a poet, some serious loss of personal distinctiveness. The last poem in *Natural Causes* is in fact an elegy for Larkin (first published in the *TLS* not long after his death): it's a mixture of reported Larkinsisms, quotations and echoes from the poems, and some modest first-person recollection. The whole thing is delicately done: the weighing of homage and grief is judged most conscientiously. But then "conscientious" is another word, like "cautious", that has often come to mind when reading Motion's verse. In this latest book, there are several signs that he might be approaching us to thank again.

# TLS

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# POETRY COMPETITION

## READERS' CHOICE

Once again, there was a large entry for the TLS/Cheltenham Festival of Literature Poetry Competition, and the winners include both established poets and relative newcomers. Well over 4,000 poems were divided equally between the judges, Grace Nichols, Peter Porter, Christopher Reid and, from the TLS, the Editor, Jeremy Treglown, and Commentary Editor, Lindsay Duguid. In response to the general feeling that last year's shortlist (eighty-six poems) was too long, each judge was asked to put forward between seven and ten poems, and the forty-six thus chosen were printed in the TLS of September 4-11.

Readers were invited to vote for the poems they preferred and the clear winner in this category was Valerie Smith's "Colonial Legacy", which wins £500. Valerie Smith was a runner-up in the first National Poetry Competition in 1978, but otherwise this is her first poem to be published. She lives in North Yorkshire, where she works in adult education.

The readers' second prize (£250) went to "Dali in the Torre Galatea" by Michael Hulse, whose most recent book of poems, *Propaganda* was published by Secker and Warburg in 1985. A translator and regular reviewer (including for the TLS), Mr Hulse teaches at the University of Cologne. A close third to his poem was Ian Caws's "Saltmarsh", which wins £100. Mr Caws, who is responsible for social services for the deaf in West Sussex, is another established poet, a past winner of an Eric Gregory Award and the author of *Boy with a Kite* (Sidgwick and Jackson, 1981) and of a forthcoming collection, *The Ragman Tots* (Redcliffe Press).

The judges had also shortlisted another of Ian Caws's poems, "The Island" (no 33), and discussed it in detail along with many others (some of them among what turned out to be the readers' choices) when they met to make their own decision, before the readers' verdict, or the authors' names, were known. The general feeling among the judges was that while no single poem stood out overwhelmingly, at least fifteen deserved to be considered very seriously. Apart from the eventual prizewinners, these included Robert Hampson's "servants of a system" (no 7), Chris Woods's "The Car Wash" (8), Clare MacDonald Shaw's "South Circular" (9), Matthew Mitchell's "Intercession with a Goddess" (11), Michael Swan's very funny "Suzhou: Guided Tour" (12), "Gauging the pneuma" (17), by last year's winner, Paul Groves, Rory Brennan's "The Old in Rapallo" (37) and "Echidna" (41) by Dominic Fisher.

However cheerfully this spread of enthusiasm confirmed the general standard of the better poems, it looked ominous from the point of view of reaching a decision. In the event, though, the judges found each other's arguments either convincing or unconvincing enough for the verdict to be surprisingly clear-cut and harmonious. Third prize went to a long-established poet (and contributor to the TLS), Alistair Elliot, whose "At Home with the Heavens" was also popular in the ballot. A former university librarian who has taken early retirement in order to give more time to his writing, Mr Elliot is the author of a number of collections published by Secker and Warburg, most recently *On the Appian Way* (1984). He wins £100.

Second prize (£250) went to the hitherto little-known poet Jane Duran for "Boogie Woogie". Born in Cuba and brought up in the United States, Ms Duran now lives in London, where she works for the British Council. Some of her work has previously been seen in *Ambit* and *London Magazine*.

The winner of the judges' first prize is the co-editor of the literary magazine, *Argo*. Hilary Davies, who wins £500 for "The Ophthalmologist", is a previous winner of an Eric Gregory Award, and has published poems and translations in several journals, including *Encounter* and the *Poetry Review*.

Most of the six prizewinners will be at Cheltenham Town Hall on Sunday, October 11 at 12.45pm to read their poems and to sign copies of their work. Tickets for the event, which includes lunch, are available at £3 from the Box Office, Town Hall, Cheltenham, Glos. The prizegiving - at which the judges will speak briefly about the winning poems - will be preceded at 12 o'clock by a reading by Grace Nichols and Peter Porter (tickets £1.50).

### Colonial Legacy / VALERIE SMITH

The nuns taught us to sew. 'Use a strong thread,  
Double for buttons. Fasten on firmly.  
Take small neat stitches, space them evenly.  
Fasten off well. The back of your work  
Should be as neat as the front.'

I am good at needlework.  
Although I stopped school in the third grade.  
What is the use, for a girl, said my father.  
She will only get married.

I make all my own clothes, and the children's.  
My man is away in the bush, fighting for freedom.

When the soldiers came, they were young, and nervous.  
They could smell our hatred, see our contempt.  
Body search first, said the sergeant, and his boys sniggered.  
They hitched up their trousers, slung rifles backwards  
Freeing their hands to fondle our bodies,  
Searching for weapons, for papers.

My soldier stepped near me and ripped at my blouse.  
But my stitches were strong: I chose good material.  
It would not tear easily. He ripped harder;  
His mates grinned, and he blushed, scowling.  
At last I undid the buttons, baring my bosom.

His sweating hands bruised me.

No weapons, no papers.

## JUDGES' CHOICE

### The Ophthalmologist / HILARY DAVIES

We are in a very dark room.  
He has the air of one not gone above  
For years; his whispers shows  
He is completely in command down here.  
So I commend myself into his gentle fingers  
That play around my head more intimately  
Than most men's should do, the trembling  
At my ear, the pressure on my temples.  
Making me turn profile from side to side,  
The touch testing my neck.  
He has many categories of sight, ranged  
In little boxes, a long, a short, an astigmatism  
In a prism of glass. His machinery  
Flickers an instant before me, lenses  
You'd love to turn in your hand  
Like ovals of limestone, waxy as opal.  
All the kingdoms he shows me of letters  
From their different angles: bold,  
Crabbed, melancholic. I peer through  
The thicknesses, pitting myself guiltily  
Against the doft fingers, the deferential mask.

Half an hour's enough to pinpoint all my weaknesses;  
How to correct blur, squint, failure to see things  
As they really are. I've grown to like  
The shadowiness with which we work,  
How outlines turn to sculpture, the world  
Dividing into lamplight and the dark.  
When he throws wide the door, I cannot rise  
Towards the greenening surface;  
Under the desks and curtains the eye-doctor  
Offers the lure of many visions,  
The honey of his systems underground.

### Dali in the Torre Galatea / MICHAEL HULSE

I might as well be a mannequin.  
Is this silk I'm wearing? Death will be silly.

Mornings they lift me from the bed to the chair.  
I might as well be sitting in a Cadillac.

Arturo used to drive me. Now he shaves me.  
Maria Teresa reads the papers to me.

I might as well be a clever fake of myself.  
They feed me through a tube up my nose.

The wall outside the window looks like Greta Garbo's lips.  
I might as well be dead.

You'd think I was a bathtub. Or a snail.  
Is this air I'm breathing? Living is silly.

You'd think I was alive.  
I might as well be alive.

### Boogie Woogie / JANE DURAN

Soap edge shoes slip nine ways  
in the gymnasium, awake all night.  
We have opened the small windows at the top,  
goblets of stars in a blur.

The girls, the fellows on the steps.  
We discover the night porcupines  
in the grass, the slopes of fireflies.  
The geranium gymnasium calls us back.  
We cannot sleep. We cannot sleep,

We line up along the walls  
in blue chiffon, in tucks and frills,  
with sad bony shoulders, in pale lemon shoes

we spin out along the polished floor  
all the mosquito folly of the dance.

### Saltmarsh / IAN CAWS

Everything disintegrates  
In the heat except these shore crabs,  
Tossed like children's badges on the swept mud,  
And where there is shadow, it floats,  
A ragged shirt over the ribs  
Of silt. I stood on this path once, near mad

With cold, and wind would not let me  
Pass, flexing like a metal sheet  
And pushing me back to the road. Today  
Its dead crabs keep me company  
And there's no breeze at all to set  
The liquid horizon. And if I die

Today, where there is space round me  
And I don't fit, and in this place  
Which has no end, I would prefer my death  
To be with the crabs, carelessly  
Scattered, random as sea asters  
Or the flight of the redshank, maybe worth

Exactly what makes them or me  
Part of this. I'm too close to cool  
Water even to notice the heat sting  
Me and too far away to see  
The sails on old Hainaker Mill  
Still multiplying nothing with nothing.

### At Home with the Heavens / ALISTAIR ELLIOT

Few of us know the sky now. Pissing indoors.  
How can you learn the dot-book of the stars?  
Our unilluminated country ancestors  
Could read it over the shoulders of their lovers,  
And in dark cities still be astronomers.

Ashamed perhaps, we skip the starry words  
Of ancient poets - who end a storm 'The clouds  
Have run away, the Bears have reappeared,  
And once again the vaporous Manger floats  
Between the Donkeys' - images old and hard.

The lights of strangers. Now we use other signs  
To pace our lives. And yet - most elements  
Inside us are the dusty work of suns:  
We should be recognising them as cousins,  
Looking them up, reviving faint connections.

So once, at sea at midnight, told to steer  
For a number on the card, I chose a star:  
Caught in the diagram of shrouds, it flared,  
A rage of light, with something softer, blurred,  
Beside it. We were led across the seas  
By both: Aldebaran and the Pleiades.

## POETRY COMPETITION SHORTLIST

The authors of the shortlisted poems are:

- 1 From this day on:  
Elizabeth Bartlett
- 2 At Home with the Heavens:  
Alistair Elliot
- 3 Beach Cafe: Oportu:  
John Wakenan
- 4 Saltmarsh:  
Ian Caws
- 5 Berlin-London 1985-6:  
Susan Wilkes
- 6 The Masochist's Week:  
Alison Neville
- 7 servants of a system:  
Robert Hampson
- 8 The Car Wash:  
Chris Woods
- 9 South Circular:  
Clare MacDonald Shaw
- 10 High Life:  
Garth Reeves
- 11 Intercession with a goddess:  
Matthew Mitchell
- 12 Suzhou:  
Michael Swan
- 13 Classic Rebuffs Irish Scissorman:  
Jonathan Trench
- 14 Variations On A Vase Of Tulips:  
Dominic Fisher
- 15 Colonial Legacy:  
Valerie Smith
- 16 The Returning Knight:  
Alan Dunnett
- 17 Gauging the pneuma:  
Paul Groves
- 18 Scene of the Crime:  
Dick Holdsworth
- 19 Boogie Woogie:  
Jane Duran
- 20 A Difficult Colour:  
John Glenday
- 21 Trance:  
Name withheld on request
- 22 The Bull:  
Meg Peacocke
- 23 Looking for the Celts:  
Gwyneth Lewis
- 24 The children of lovers are orphans:  
Connie Bensley
- 25 Better Chaste:  
Debra J. Lewis
- 26 Dali in the Torre Galatea:  
Michael Hulse
- 27 The Breeding Habits of Books:  
Sylvia Kantaris
- 28 Your Shoulder:  
Robin Fulton
- 29 Castle Taylor:  
Jonathan Trench
- 30 The scream:  
Colin McKechnie
- 31 The Ophthalmologist:  
Hilary Davies
- 32 The Tale of the Row Boat:  
P. C. Maurer-Alvarez
- 33 The Island:  
Ian Caws
- 34 The Owl and the Pussy-Cat Part II:  
Colin Alexander
- 35 Kong:  
Peter Thistlethwaite
- 36 Trees as men, standing:  
Alistair Macnaughton
- 37 The Old in Rapallo:  
Rory Brennan
- 38 Doing Italy:  
Stephen Knight
- 39 Othello:  
Hilary Strange
- 40 Linger:  
Name withheld on request
- 41 Echidna:  
Dominic Fisher
- 42 Massi Warrior:  
Jack Herbert
- 43 My daughter, restless tonight:  
William Palmer
- 44 The School Party 1962:  
Jane Gershom Wood
- 45 Exile:  
Iain Lurie
- 46 The Dancer:  
John L. Miller

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## An interest in incidentals

Lachlan Mackinnon

Picture books aimed at children at or around the moment of literacy assume an interest in narrative as well as in detail. Philippe Dupasquier's *Our House on the Hill* is a wordless delight, each turning of the page revealing a double spread of a new month in the same place. On the left we find the landscape as a whole, with lots of small details – natural and human – to discuss. On the right, four or five small frames tell a story arising from a human incident in the former. As we follow a family through the year we explore all sorts of different feelings and are exercised by interpretation. Benedict Blathwayt's *Tangle and the Firesticks* is a quest-story, traditional in form, set in a miniature world. His characters are rustic forerunners with a developed social structure. Tangle is the bad boy sent away to learn his lesson who returns with a priceless treasure: a human gives him matches which can be used to relight the fires put out by storms. The human appears only as a hand and a shoe, enough to suggest a lumberjack or trapper but to leave the question open, and though kindly is skilfully left vague. The illustrations are almost too detailed, but redeemed by the narrative's implicit directions as to how to read them. Both these books can be warmly recommended.

*Mister Cat-and-a-half* is a less complex fable, using verbal repetition of the kind children love, to describe how the hero marries and how his greed and various misunderstandings make him the most feared figure in the forest. It is an amusing celebration of self-seeking. The illustrations are a little stark, presenting the animals as Restoration gillants but supplying rather too little of their world. Richard Pevnar's narrative dominates Robert Rayevsky's pictures, and this is very much a book for reading aloud. As such, it is a moderate success.

Erik Hjorth Nielsen's *Water Boy* is much more baffling. It sets up a contrast between the peasant Paolo and his richer cousin Eduardo, whose modern bathroom is wrecked by a flood. The Brazilian small-town locale is credible and the pictures fairly good. Exclamations such as "Hey, man!" and "you drunken oaf!" and the reappearance of sewage through the bathtub, however, propose a kind of comedy hard for parents and children to negotiate together. The implicit message could be taken by a child reading alone to be that peasants are better off without bathrooms; and the confusion of linguistic and moral registers is ultimately distasteful.

## Comforting connections

Elizabeth Barry

ANNE ROCKWELL.  
*The Three Bears and 15 Other Stories*  
117pp. Hamish Hamilton. £7.95.  
0241 892139  
JANET AND ALLAN AHLBERG  
*The Clothes Horse and other stories*  
32pp. Viking Kestrel. £6.95.  
0670 812676

At the far end of the Folk-market from learned discussion of sources and symbols is an ever-renewed audience for collections of undemanding traditional stories with which to entertain and satisfy young children. Anne Rockwell's anthology, which was originally published in the United States, selects and simply retells a range of familiar tales: "The Lion and the Mouse", "The Three Billy Goats Gruff", "The Shoemaker and the Elves". Her illustrations emphasize the comforting bedtime element in the stories. Her colours are bright and childish; every stage of the gingerbread man's dash for freedom and the Wolf's assault on the house of the third little pig is shown. The atmosphere is bright and cheerful; the Wolf looks quite fetching in the grandmother's "nightgown and cap" and the ghost's voice in "Teeny-Tiny" issues from a pretty blue cupboard in a well-lit room. As a nicely bound, relatively inexpensive collection for the very young its virtues are offset only by its lack of ambition.

The Ahlbergs are seldom content with the

Children can slowly be interested in social history, but John S. Goodall's *The Story of a High Street* will make heavy going of it. The book is a bad example of a traditional format, whole pages interspersed with half-pages whose turning advances the picture in time. Had the book been assembled so that the edges married properly it would have been marginally better, but the painting is so impressionistically blurred that there is little detail to discuss. There are, of course, no words, and none of that lingering Ladybird impact.

Two books by Ivor Cutler, illustrated by Helen Oxenbury, have been reissued, *Meal One* (1971) and *The Animal House* (1976). Each is as trivially inconsequential as the other, the occasional good idea sputters out and the illustrations are uninteresting. This operation feels like an attempt to cash in on Oxenbury's later reputation: only those seduced by names on jackets will buy either.

Margaret Mahy's texts *The Boy With Two Shadows* (1971) and *17 Kings and 42 Elephants* (1972) have been republished with new illustrations. In the former, a boy agrees to take care of a witch's shadow, which displaces his own and makes life difficult for him. Jenny Williams's pictures look hasty, and the tone is falsely intimate: "The warm summer afternoon was so quiet he could hear the witch shadow laughing – or rather, he heard the echo of laughing (because, as you know, an echo is the shadow of sound, and sometimes the sound of a shadow)." That "as you know" repels. The publishers might have considered whether such a wordy text, if it needed reillustration, deserved republication. So should they with *17 Kings*, a pointless rhyme with inappropriately garish new pictures.

Philippe Dupasquier: *Our House on the Hill*. 28pp. Andersen. £5.95. 0 86264 167 5.  
Benedict Blathwayt: *Tangle and the Firesticks*. 32pp. Julia MacRae. £6.95. 0 86203 291 1.  
Richard Pevnar: *Mister Cat-and-a-half*. Illustrated by Robert Rayevsky. 32pp. Andersen. £5.95. 0 86264 170 5.  
Erik Hjorth Nielsen: *Water Boy: A story of two boys from a little town in Brazil*. Methuen. £5.50. 0 416 02772 5.  
John S. Goodall: *The Story of a High Street*. 32pp. Deutsch. £5.95. 0 233 98070 9.  
Ivor Cutler: *Meal One*. Illustrated by Helen Oxenbury. Heinemann. £5.95. 0 434 93350 3. *The Animal House*. Illustrated by Helen Oxenbury. Heinemann. £5.95. 0 434 93353 8.  
Margaret Mahy: *The Boy with Two Shadows*. Illustrated by Jenny Williams. 32pp. Dent. £5.95. 0 460 06241 7. *17 Kings and 42 Elephants*. Illustrated by Patricia MacCarthy. 32pp. Dent. £6.95. 0 460 06254 9.

comforting. Although based on the same fairy-tale tradition that Rockwell uses, *The Clothes Horse and other stories*, a collection of six original stories with fairy-tale themes, is playful and anarchic. The text takes pleasing liberties with the expected in a series of asides, which draw attention to its being only a story ("For at this point in the story we come to a sort of right turn, as it were"), while at the same time providing more and more details about what happened next – to the clothes horse's clothes, to the Night Train which brings the night, and to the old woman who had saved a day from when she was eight: "She played on the swings and rolled on the grass and fished in the pond and ate ice-cream." The rare combination of decorum and invention is beautifully complemented by Janet Ahlberg's pictures. She shows a horse made out of clothes, a giant (who has a Jack problem) chucking two tiny figures into the pot under the sink watched by his giant wife and giant young son in trainers. She even contrives to depict God with a long white robe and sandals, just visible behind the newspaper as his children ("there were three of them") clamber on his knee for a bedtime story. Her creations, however, are always part of a charming world of milkmen's horses, baby cats and bedroom slippers in a range of soft colours.

Hamish Hamilton have recently reissued *The Mother Goose Treasury* by Raymond Briggs (217pp. £9.95. 0 241 90800 0), a liberally illustrated compendium of nursery rhymes based on the Opies' collections. The book, which is well-indexed from the Kate Greenaway medal for Briggs when it was first published in 1968,



An illustration from *Sing a Song for Sixpence* by Randolph Caldecott (1880) which has recently been reissued by Hutchinson as part of their Golden Classics series (30pp. £3.95. 0 09 172534 2).

## Picture power

George Szirtes

Two of the liveliest books here are by author-illustrators who have assumed and capitalized on the natural domination of pictures over the text. Babette Cole and Margaret Gordon's books for very young readers provide the visual environments in which their narrative wit can prosper. The cliché of "Sometimes I think she lives on another planet!" has provided Babette Cole with an excuse to invent a mischievous alien granny with retractable antennae who may appear to lead the life of a normal old woman but who turns into a green monster when she is annoyed. Granny and her OAP friends are bullied by a breezy young teacher into a seaside trip to gloomy Wethorpe. Granny is determined on her revenge and trails along behind the rest, a wicked Martian grin on her face, antennae menacingly quivering. She makes people disappear, transforms herself into a bathing beauty, litters the tea rooms with her disgusting monster acquaintances and whisks everyone off to Planet Gran. She is a delightfully tough and independent old woman. To the very young the old may well seem like otherworldly creatures, and the book treats them with a warm engaging humour that allows them both crankiness and dignity.

*Frogs' Holiday* imagines a community of frogs taking their holiday in Mrs Crumple's launderette. The frogs' town is under the municipal pond. When they leave they assume human garb and turn into conventional tourists. Mrs Crumple's own fat and froglike baby takes an immediate liking to the visitors. Mrs Crumple herself is a far from put-upon creature and shares the frogs' dislike of small boys. The colours are less subtle and the story doesn't have quite the energy of Babette Cole's book, but it will brighten many children's expectations of the everyday.

Chris Riddell's lively and clever illustrations squeeze every last drop of entertainment out of *The Magician's Cat*, which concerns an incompetent magician and his cat who apply to rid a distant kingdom of the Unwanted Beast that has been bothering them. The Beast only wants to be accepted for what he is. The story itself is not particularly inventive, but Riddell sets it in the modern world and his immense confidence and draughtsmanship do the rest. Many will be tempted by the cover alone.

The balance between text and illustration is much the same in *Our Mammoth*. Adrian Mitchell describes two boys discovering a vast block of ice in the sea. It melts down and out lingers a mammoth, which the boys ride home and which happily accepts into the family. Again the story is thin but Priscilla Lamont uses a broad and woefully watercolour technique and a whimsical, childlike style to

Shirley Hughes to flesh it out.

*Let's Go Swimming with Mr Sillypans* may encourage children to face swimming lessons with equanimity, but essentially it is an excuse for another artist-writer to set a dream under water. Mr Sillypans prepares to go to bed apprehensive of his first swimming lesson the following morning. He makes himself a vast sandwich and dreams he has an accident whereby he is transformed into a fish menaced by even bigger fish and by the lettuce in his sandwiches. When he wakes up he is convinced everything will be all right and it is. The dream might frighten very little children, but it will entertain older ones with its mild craziness.

The two wisest books are William Mayne's *Lamb Shenkin* and Denis Glover's *The Magpies*. They are the only books which attempt to do more than amuse or improve children's habits. Lamb Shenkin is born in winter and is brought up in the snowy fields. His encounters with humans and other lambs are complicated by the fact that he is a young ram who is marked out for the show. His confusion and his development are seen with an observant and not too anthropomorphic eye. The drawings are as gentle and ruminative as the text, and do not dominate it. The slightly shocking truth that Lamb Shenkin forgets his mother at the end of the book is a mild introduction to worlds as real but quite other than the child's. It is a lovely book whose detail and understanding will remain with the reader.

*The Magpies* is a short poem describing a long stretch of time. Tom and Elizabeth take over a farm, work hard at it for many years but the mortgage man takes it away from them. When Elizabeth dies old Tom goes light in the head and when he dies the farm is in a state of ruin and the mortgage corporations cannot even give it away. The magpies of the title lend their eternal nonsense chorus to every stage of this brief history. The facts themselves are brutal but the poem and the rough energetic impasto paintings against which the handwritten verses are set, take away the pain with their vitality. When you turn the page the magpie appears but the other details are simply reproduced. This is another worthwhile book which will establish itself in the memory.

Babette Cole: *The Trouble with Gran*. 32pp. Heinemann. £5.95. 0 434 93296 5.  
Margaret Gordon: *Frogs' Holiday*. 29pp. Viking Kestrel. £5.95. 0 670 80854 7.  
Jeff Willmott: *The Magician's Cat*. Illustrated by Chris Riddell. 30pp. Faber. £5.95. 0 571 14672 4.  
Adrian Mitchell: *Our Mammoth*. Illustrated by Priscilla Lamont. 28pp. Walker. £5.95. 0 7445 029 3.  
M. K. Brown: *Let's Go Swimming with Mr Sillypans*. 24pp. Macmillan. £5.95. 0 333 45445 6.  
William Mayne: *Lamb Shenkin*. Illustrated by Jonathan Heale. 28pp. Walker. £5.95. 0 7445 029 3.  
Denis Glover: *The Magpies*. Illustrated by Doreen Gill. 25pp. Century Hutchinson. £5.95. 0 04 17253 4.

continued from page 1108

looking at it. The opportunity to have a good, unhurried view of the Spanish market is, for foreign publishers, one of the attractions of "Liber 87", the fifth International Book Fair, which was opened in Madrid last week by Felipe González. "When I go to Frankfurt next week", said the man from Hodder and Stoughton, "my diary's crammed full of half-hour appointments. Here, it's not so hectic. You can really get the feel of what's going on. It's an excellent place to find smaller publishers, too, and the Latin American ones." The Latin American connection is one of the key features of the Spanish fair. "Liber is to the Spanish-speaking world what Frankfurt is to Europe", explained Charles Hyde, Sales and Marketing manager for Longman Penguin España.

The shelves of the British stand reflected what is currently the stock-in-trade of translation-rights deals with Spanish publishers: crime and suspense novels. Patricia Highsmith, John le Carré and David Serafin are already old favourites, Agatha Christie a classic. Ruth Rendell, P. D. James, Julian Symons, James Melville and J. R. Keating are among those who will, or hope to be, available shortly to Spanish-speaking readers. In a sense, this reveals a curious contradiction. English-language publishers see Spain as an up-and-coming market for translations into Spanish of their authors and yet more and more people want to learn English and the market for English Language Teaching books is flourishing as never before. Indeed, this is what prompted Longman Penguin in 1985 to take the pioneering step of setting up their Spanish company – a hunch which has evidently paid off. But obviously it will take time for today's English-language learners to become regular English-literature readers (and if the *El País* survey is anything to go by, the wait may be very long for them to become readers in any language). In the meantime, they, too, are launching into the translation sector. A forthcoming collection of Beatrix Potter tales is the first of several projects.

\* \* \*

Last year, a Madrid-based press agency correspondent sent a dispatch in which, *inter alia*, he enthused about a cultural revival visible in the streets of Spain's cities. He was referring to the almost overnight proliferation of trendy pavement cafés; the upsurge of young, *nouvelle* vague painters, poets, writers, fashion designers and photographers, the outdoor music, the street theatre. "The word coined to embrace it all was *la movida* – literally "the stir", more or less meaning "the in scene". It was thought by some – especially the participants – to be a social and cultural renaissance. This year, *la movida* has found an acid critic in the social-democratic intellectual, Luis González Seara, who maintains that the enthusiasm it excites is based on a fatal confusion between art and mere theatrical decor. "An illiterate with ideas is not a revolutionary creator, but a joker", writes González Seara in *El Independiente*, a new weekly newspaper. "Whatever way you look at it," he continues, "Spanish cultural production isn't exactly something to shout about. . . . It isn't a good system to unleash a kind of cultural inflation, slipping in false merchandise by the back door, because that inflation will eventually devalue the good currency which undoubtedly does exist." One man's cultural explosion is another man's indoor firework.

Two recent works contribute to the history of the circulation of scientific books and of the second-hand book trade in late seventeenth-century England. Stanton J. Linden's edition of *A Catalogue of Chymical Books, 1673-88* by William Cooper (159pp. New York: Garland, \$37. 0 8240 8557 4) rearranges Cooper's lists into alphabetical order and adds bibliographical notes. Jeremiah S. Finch's edition of the *Catalogue of the Libraries of Sir Thomas Browne and Dr Edward Browne, his son* (177p. Laiden: Brill / Sir Thomas Browne Institute, H1252. 90 04 07920 3) contains a headnote of Thomas Ballard's 1711 auction catalogue with a description of the library's location and dispersal.

Virgil Nemoianu

MARIN SORESCU  
*Vlad Dracula, the Impaler*  
Translated by Dennis Deleant  
111pp. Forest, 20 Forest View, Chingford, London E4 7AY. Paperback, £6.95.  
0948259 078  
*The Youth of Don Quixote*  
Translated by John F. Deane  
67pp. Daedalus Press, 46 Seabury, Parade Avenue, Sandymount, Dublin 4. £5.70.  
Paperback, £3.60.  
0948268 247  
*The Biggest Egg in the World*  
Translated by D.J. Enright and others  
79pp. Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Bloodaxe.  
Paperback, £4.95.  
1852240 021

Marin Soreescu belongs to a generation of Romanian poets who had the good luck and the quick wit to take advantage of a short period of liberalism in Romania's post-war history some twenty-five years ago. What makes him different from virtually all the other young poets of that time, however, is his refusal to accept that verbal adventurousness has to start from some solemn or prophetic basis. Soreescu's is a voice of comedy: his first volume in 1964 was a collection of parodies, mostly of poets of his own generation, which get far enough under their skin to initiate a subtle and ironic collaboration with them. He is like some street-wise urchin who pretends surprise and incredulity, whereas in fact he wants only to infiltrate the patterns of social existence or the physical universe and to see them, with mock despair, from the inside. Black humour, a keen feeling for the absurd, genuine delight, human

resourcefulness in adversity, all have a part in his work, as well, sometimes, as mawkishness and histrionics. The audience has responded warmly to all this and Soreescu is perhaps the most popular Romanian poet, both inside his country and abroad.

His reactions to an increasingly absurd political régime were always cleverly balanced: he never engaged in the servile praise of leader and party usually required of Romanian poets, but nor did he venture into dissidence. He was content to let irony do its job, while keeping *Ramuri*, the monthly journal he edited, within the limits acceptable to the party. His texts are masterpieces of allusion and adroit manoeuvring. This is seen best in Soreescu's plays, which are written in the poetic tradition of Giraudoux and Christopher Fry. His *Vlad Dracula, the Impaler* (now translated by Dennis Deleant into fluent and elegant English) presents a character who preserves many features of the official picture, of a valiant prince engaged in a struggle against alien invaders as well as against domestic vices.

But Soreescu adds two things: he complicates the character (his Dracula seeks out punishment for his crimes) and lays bare his irrational savagery. The play is dramatically weak, having little unity or continuity, but some of the minor characters are interesting, and the dialogue is both lively and witty. Numerous small darts are thrown, for the delight of Romanian audiences, who unfailingly apply them to local circumstances (for example, of people dying impaled high up in the air: "You no sooner get into lofty positions than you start stinking"). In defining his attitude towards oppression, Soreescu appears magnificently ambiguous.

It would be wrong to think of him however as a thorough Machiavellian. Much of his ambiguity is more deeply rooted: he shows an amused wonder before history and nature, a childish gaze always in the point of turning into

a guffaw. In one poem God creates Eve out of Adam's rib, but Adam is soon caught slyly forming new Eves out of his remaining ribs, until he is thrown out of paradise "for committing surrealism". Rows of cranes flying in the sky may be compared to "sonnets for the masses". In another poem Soreescu complains of having run out of days of the week because each one is already occupied by so many historical catastrophes and crimes. Ultimately, his poetry is informed by an endearing and almost wise naiveté.

Soreescu is easy to translate, because he uses colloquial language and shies away from rhyme or intricate rhythms. John F. Deane's versions in *The Youth of Don Quixote* are flat and faithful, but *The Biggest Egg in the World* is more exciting because of its variety – some poems are given in two versions and there is even one piece in the original Romanian. Curiously enough, the versions by D. J. Enright (perhaps the English poet whom Soreescu most resembles) are not among the most successful, because they seem too serious in tone; by contrast, David Constantine's are original in a way that distances them from the originals. Michael Hamburger comes much closer to rendering the feline smoothness to be found beneath the informal exterior of Soreescu's verse, while, surprisingly, a few of Ted Hughes's translations are equally effective in their impassive transparency.

In the last quarter of a century, four or five other Romanian poets at least have produced verse of more substance and visionary scope than that of Soreescu. However, he surpasses all of them inasmuch as he represents the voice of a community that has had to respond to sore trials and pressures without recourse to heroism or to a tragic sense of life. His rueful jocularity and the good-natured cynicism are responses frequent among Romanians and perfectly crystallized in Soreescu's poetry.

## AMONG THIS WEEK'S CONTRIBUTORS

Robin Buss is a lecturer in French at Woolwich College of Further Education.  
G. P. Butler is Professor of German at the University of Bath.  
Michael Butler is Head of German Studies in the University of Birmingham. His *The Plays of Max Frisch* was published last year.  
Roger Cardinal is the author of *Figures of Reality: A perspective on the poetic imagination*, 1981, and *Expressionism*, 1984. His critical study *Breton: Nadja* appeared last year.  
David Coward is a lecturer in French at the University of Leeds, and the author of *The Dreyfus Affair*, 1983. His study of *Restif de La Bretonne* will appear next year.  
Masolino d'Amico is Professor of English at the University of Rome.  
Robert Donington's *Baroque Music: Style and performance* appeared in 1982.  
P. N. Furbank is Visiting Professor in Literature at the Open University. His books include the two-volume biography of E. M. Forster, published in 1977 and 1978.  
Julian Grafty is a lecturer in Russian at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London.  
Jan Hamilton's books include *Robert Lowell: A biography*, 1983.  
Julian Hillon is the author of *Georg Büchner*, 1982.  
Michael Hofmann's two collections of poems are *Nights in the Iron Hotel*, 1984, and *Acrimony*, 1986.  
Geoffrey A. Hocking is Professor of Russian History at the School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University of London, and the author of *History of the Soviet Union*, 1985.  
Robert Irwin's books include *The Middle East in the Middle Ages: The early Muslim Sultanate 1250-1382*, 1986, and *History of the Mamluk Sultanate of Egypt and Syria*, 1985.  
Anna Laura Lepesky is a lecturer in Italian at University College London.  
Lachlan Mackinnon's poems appeared in *New Chano Poets*, 1986.  
J. F. McMillan is a lecturer in History at the University of York and is spending this academic year at California State University at Long Beach. His *Dreyfus to de Gaulle: Politics and society in France 1898-1969* was published in 1985.  
J. Ellis Miller is Professor of English at Yale University. His most recent book is *The Ethics of Reading: Kant, de Man, Eliot, Trollope, James and Benjamin*, published earlier this year.  
Dervla Murphy's *Eight Feet in the Andes* was published in 1983, and her *Muddling Through in Madagascar* in 1985.  
David Nokes's *Jonathan Swift: A hypocrite reversed*, 1985, has just been reissued in paperback.  
S. S. Prawer's *Frankenstein's Island: England and the English in the writings of Heinrich Heine* was published last year.  
Stephen Romer's collection of poems, *Idols*, was published last year. He was a prize-winner in the TLS/Cheltenham Poetry Competition in 1983.  
John Russell is the author of *The Opera Industry in Italy from Cimarosa to Verdi: The role of the impresario*, 1984.  
Harvey Sachs is the author of *Tasciana*, 1978, and *Virunso*, 1982. His *Music in Fascist Italy* is published this week.  
Andrew Sanders was editor of *The Dickensian* from 1979 to 1986. He contributed a chapter on the High Victorians to the recent *Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*.  
Michael Sprinker teaches literary criticism and theory at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. His books include *Imaginary Relations: Aesthetics and ideology in the theory of historical materialism*, published recently.  
Georg Szirtes's most recent book of poems is *The Photographer in Winter*, 1986. Some of his verse for children is included in *Meet and Write 2*, edited by Alan and Sandy Brownjohn, 1987.  
Oliver Taplin is the author of *Greek Tragedy in Action*, 1979.  
Edward Timms is co-editor of *Unreal City: Urban experience in modern European literature and art*, 1985, and the author of *Karl Kraus: Apocalyptic satirist*, which appeared last year.  
J. J. White is Reader in German at King's College, London. He is the co-editor of *Musil in Focus*, 1982, and of *British: Literary images of a city*, which will appear next spring.  
Laurence Whitehead is a Fellow of Nuffield College, Oxford, and the author of *Simone de Beauvoir* and *The Limits of Commitment*, 1981.  
Michael Wood is Professor of English at Essex University and the author of *America in the Movies: Or, 'Santa Maria, I Had Slipped My Mind'*, 1975.

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## Anthropology

O'Neill, Brian Juan Social Inequality in a Portuguese Hamlet: 1 and, late marriage, and bastardy, 1870-1970 (Cambridge Studies in Social Anthropology) Cambridge UP, 1987, illus. £10.95, 0 521 32284 7, 11/10/87.

## Archaeology

Norman, Bruce Footsteps: Nine archaeological journeys of romance and discovery BBC, 279pp., plates. £14.95, 0 563 20552 0, 15/10/87.

## Architecture

Matheson, Hermann, translated by Janet Seligman; edited by Donald Sharpe The English House (1st pub in Germany 1904/5) Oxford: Blackwell Scientific, 246pp., illus. £17.95 (paperback), 0 632 01853 4.  
Tracy, Charles English Gothic Choir-Stalls 1200-1400 Woodbridge: Boydell, 82pp., plates. £50, 0 85115 468 9, 8/10/87.

## Art

Bali, Yve-Alain, et al. Indigam: Reference and simulation in recent painting and sculpture MIT/ Boston: Institute of Contemporary Art, 115pp., illus. £11.75, 0 262 3118 0, 5/87.  
Carver, David Artwriting Amherst: Massachusetts UP, 101pp., illus. £16 (hardcover), £8 (paperback), 0 87023 561 3 (hc), 0 87023 562 1 (pb), 10/87.  
Garner, Beatrice B. Federal Philadelphia 1785-1825: The Athens of the Western world Philadelphia Museum of Art, dist. Philadelphia: Pennsylvania UP, 360pp., plates. £81.22, 958 1 (hc), 0 87631 069 3 (pb), 10/87.  
Krawcheck, Lucian Art and Concept: A philosophical study Amherst: Massachusetts UP, 127pp., £16, 0 87023 563 X, 10/87.  
Laurie, Suzanne The Art of Matthew Paris in the "Chronica Majora" Aldershot: Scolar/ Cambridge: Corpus Christi College, 333pp., illus. £25, 0 85967 733 8, 15/10/87.

Lough, John, and Elizabeth Merson John Graham Lough 1798-1876: A Northumbrian sculptor Woodbridge: Boydell, 95pp., plates. £19.95, 0 85115 460 8, 30/7/87.  
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